

Cabinet appoints Turkmenistan representative

AMMAN (Petra) — The Cabinet Saturday appointed Mousa Breizat, Jordan's ambassador to Turkey, as non-ambassador plenipotentiary in Turkmenistan.

At a meeting chaired by Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, the Cabinet formed a delegation, led by Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply Hani Mulki, to attend the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial conference, due in Geneva from May 18 to 20.

The conference coincides with the 50th anniversary of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The Cabinet approved a protocol on health cooperation between Jordan and Libya that was signed in Amman earlier this month, and endorsed the minutes of the joint Jordanian-Libyan meeting, which prepared for the higher joint meeting next month.

The Cabinet approved of Jordan's participation in an environmental conference to be held in New Delhi early next month.

A delegation was given permission to attend a meeting in Morocco on June 23 on customs and facilitating customs procedures in the Arab World.

The Cabinet approved the formation of a delegation to attend the seventh Arab conference on traffic, to be held in Tunis on May 4.

The first secretary at the Jordanian embassy in Paris was authorised to sign a fourth agreement to reschedule Jordan's debts to France.



REGENT MEETS WITH FIELD MARSHAL: HRH Prince Mohammad, the Regent, Saturday meets with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Mirza Kaabneh, and discusses issues of common concern to the Armed Forces (Jordan Armed Forces photo)

Human rights group urges government to address poverty, unemployment

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordan Society for Human Rights (JSHR) has urged the government to give due attention to the questions of poverty and unemployment, saying that these foment the despair and frustration that lead to crimes.

In a statement issued Saturday, JSHR said that according to recent statistics from the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, poverty affects one-third of the Kingdom's population and the unemployment rate now stands at more than 25 per cent.

While prices are skyrocketing, wages and salaries are increasing at a very slow rate, thus aggravating the situation, especially for the limited income groups, said the statement.

As a result of poverty and unemployment, the majority of youths have lost confidence

in the country's future and do not see a solution in the coming years, according to the statement, which cited the recent report of a man killing his entire family because of his frustration stemming from providing for them.

While praising the government for recently opening a centre at the Public Security Department to offer help to the most vulnerable sectors of society — battered wives and sexually and physically abused women and children — the statement called on the government to address the causes of such crimes.

The Family Protection Unit, officially inaugurated by HRH Crown Prince Hassan last month, is staffed by police officers specialised in the fields of sociology, psychology and law, and investigates and deals with crimes committed within the family, such

as rape, incest, physical abuse and threats as well as forcing women to engage in immoral acts.

JSHR called on the government to re-examine its present policies and ensure that the rights of citizens are protected, in accordance with article 23 of the Jordanian constitution.

It urged the government to guarantee people's economic and social rights, without which, the statement said, the country is bound to witness further acts of violence, robberies, embezzlement and murders, among other crimes that have been on the increase in recent years.

The statement also urged the government to speed up the introduction of the draft law on children's rights, which was drawn up by a national task force on children several months ago.

Ports corporation director criticises continued presence of inspection teams

AMMAN (J.T.) — The director general of the Jordan Ports Corporation (JPC) Saturday criticised the continued presence of the Lloyds' inspection team at Aqaba, saying that Aqaba port pays \$190,000 per month to the British firm to search goods destined for Jordan and Iraq.

Speaking at a press conference in Aqaba, JPC chief Mohammad Dalabih said the losses make Jordan's port less competitive and

adversely affect the national economy.

Lloyds has been entrusted with conducting the inspections, replacing the former allied forces ships enforcing U.N. sanctions on Iraq.

Capt. Dalabih noted, however, that incoming goods destined for Iraq within the framework of the Iraq-U.N. food-for-oil deal are not subject to search.

Referring to Iraqi imports, Capt. Dalabih said the food-

for-oil accord has boosted the operations of the Aqaba port, through which much of Iraqi food and medicine passes. He said the port can accommodate 60,000-tonne capacity vessels, which cannot dock in the smaller Iraqi ports.

According to Capt. Dalabih, Aqaba port has the advantage of being able to unload 12 tonnes of goods per day.

The economic situation in

Jordan has improved due to the port's increased activity, said Capt. Dalabih, who noted that in January and February, exports via Aqaba rose six per cent and imports by 18 per cent over last year. He said the 40,000 trucks travelling between Aqaba and other destinations in Jordan transported 945,000 tonnes of goods over the past two months, compared to 696,000 tonnes in the same period last year.

Small explosion hits school, none injured

AMMAN (J.T.) — An explosive device went off Saturday morning at the entrance of a school located near the Seventh Circle, causing damage to windows and doors but no injuries, a spokesperson for the Public Security Department said.

The source told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that the explosion took place at 1:30 a.m. Saturday morning in front of the Modern American School, which is owned by a Jordanian citizen.

The director of the school, Tayseer Zamel, was quoted by Reuters as saying: "We received a phone call that there was a loud noise in the school. The police investigated the incident and it seems there was some kind of an explosion outside the school building, which damaged a few windows."

Man sentenced to death for 1996 murder of Turkish national

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Criminal Court sentenced a 31-year-old man to death after finding him guilty of murdering a Turkish national and attempting to murder another near the Jordanian-Saudi border in October 1996.

Arafat Yousef was found guilty of murdering Ardam Khalil, 26, and attempting to murder Muthafar Akef, 30, during a ride he received from the two near the border post.

According to the court,

Mr. Yousef, who was carrying an unlicensed gun, decided to take their lives because he thought they were carrying large amounts of money.

The defendant drew his gun, asked Mr. Khalil to pull over, and shot him in the back of the head, the court said.

Mr. Akef woke up, overpowered the defendant, took his gun, and started running toward the desert.

The suspect chased him with the car, struck him and seriously injured him before attempting to flee on foot.

However, "bystanders, who heard Mr. Akef's pleas for help, chased the defendant and detained him."

Mr. Yousef's attorney tried to file a claim of insanity, but the court rejected his motion after doctors examined him and found him mentally competent.

The verdict, handed down by Justices Mohammad Ajameh, Mifteh Mobeidin and Issa Hamdan last week, will automatically be reviewed by the Court of Cassation with the next 30 days.

Court acquits two of murder after ruling confessions were forced

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Criminal Court, in a rare ruling, Saturday acquitted a man and a woman of the premeditated murder of a baby girl after doctors proved that confessions from one of the two suspects were extracted under duress and torture.

Saleh Salem, 55, and Mariam Saleh, 40, both detained since Sept. 4, 1997, were originally charged with the premeditated murder of the five-day-old baby, who was allegedly born out of wedlock in 1992.

But the court, headed by Judge Marwan Dabbas and including Judges Sami Karaki and Ibrahim

Ali, found both suspects innocent after "it was proven by doctors that Mr. Salem was subjected to torture by the authorities and was forced to confess."

"The medical examiner's reports indicated that Mr. Salem was badly beaten up in different parts of his body while in the custody of the authorities for questioning," Judge Dabbas said.

Further, he maintained that "the body of the child was never found, hence, there is no solid legal evidence to support the prosecution's allegations of premeditated murder."

According to court documents, Ms. Saleh, then in divorce proceedings, met Mr. Salem in

1992 and worked at his shop in Jerash. They developed a relationship and shortly afterwards, she became pregnant, the court said.

The two then decided to get rid of the child, the court added. Mr. Salem drove her to Zarqa and dropped her near a house and left. Upon his return, he told the child's mother that the baby girl fell ill and died.

The matter was uncovered when neighbours of Ms. Saleh complained to police that Mr. Salem was regularly visiting her. Criminal Prosecutor Bassem Momani, who had asked the court for the maximum penalty, said he plans to appeal the verdict.

Market reforms in developing countries hurting women — professor

By Hind-Lara Mango
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Market reforms implemented in many countries as part of the increasingly global economy have harmed women, who remain the labour market's most vulnerable sector, according to a university professor.

In Latin America, Africa and parts of the Middle East, women workers, who often accept lower wages than men, have become the cheapest producers under globalisation, added Haleb Afshar, political scientist at the University of York in England.

In a recent lecture at the British Council, she said the feminisation of the labour market has become a predominant characteristic of the workforce in a global market.

She described it as mainly a part-time, almost entirely insecure workforce largely made up of often very young women.

"The global market demands a flexible workforce," she said. Therefore, men who expect to have full time and secure jobs are not ideal members of such a workforce, she told the Jordan Times after the lecture, which covered the effects of globalisation and structural adjustment on women.

In electronics and in most international agricultural projects, women have become the obvious workers.

"The flexibility of the female working force has made them a target by producers as the best kind of workers to have," said Dr. Afshar. "When seasonal or part-time work is completed,

women can go home and not have any impact on the unemployment figures."

In general, women worldwide are less paid than men.

"Often women are paid less than half [as much as] men, and at best two-thirds as much as men," added Dr. Afshar, an author of two books on this topic.

She said all factors indicated that women work much harder than men, concentrate more, and are more likely to stay on with the job.

She said economic reform plans presented by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have harmed women.

Dr. Afshar explained that these institutions have put certain demands on Third World countries who are recipients of aid.

"Underdeveloped countries have to adjust their economies from the non-tradable to the tradable," said Dr. Afshar.

She explained that the difficulty with this is that non-tradables include services provided by the governments such as health, education, and social welfare.

According to Dr. Afshar, these services are not only used by women, but are also staffed by them.

"Retraction in the welfare, health, and educational sectors is highly detrimental to women because it makes them unemployed."

Adjustment means that the state no longer gives anything for free unless an individual lives in abject poverty, Dr. Afshar explained.

Jordan launched IMF-directed economic reforms in 1989.

Islamists maintain dominance in agricultural engineers' union

AMMAN (J.T.) — Led by incumbent Jordan Agricultural Engineers Association (JAEA) President Hassan Jaber, Islamist candidates again have reasserted their dominance of the union's council for the third election in a row.

The final results of Friday's elections at the Professional Associations Complex, released Saturday, saw Abdul Hadi Al Fallahat elected vice president and the following as council members: Mohammad Obeidat, Salim Al Nabulsi, Ahmad Qatfan, Abdul Shaqour Jamjoun, Bassem Al Abdullah, Mourad Al Adaleh and Mahmoud Abu Ghaneimeh.

The JAEA lists 5,550 members on its membership roster, although only 2,468 have the right to vote. Of these, only 1,464 members cast votes in Friday's balloting.

"People have lost interest in the association for two reasons," a general assembly member said Friday. "The elections, you can see, are highly politicised — there are two camps to choose from, nationalist or Islamic. Their slogans are largely political."

Both Mr. Jaber and his rival for the presidency,

Mohammad Abu Ayash, said prior to the elections that they would "stand firm" against the advancement of normal ties with Israel — which they said threaten the advancement of the agricultural sector — in addition to fighting unemployment in the sector and seeking better investment of the association's retirement fund.

The government in recent years has been quick to criticise the professional associations for extending their mandates to political causes, particularly the issue of "normalisation," at the expense of addressing issues that directly affect the associations' members.

The associations' objection to normalisation with Israel has been a main tenant of most councils — largely dominated by Islamists — and was no exception in the agricultural engineers' elections last weekend.

The government is currently considering drafting a new law that would curb the associations' abilities to operate as political fora, presumably to quell dissent from anti-Israeli quarters. This too, both presidential candidates said, would be unacceptable to the association.

Mohammad Lahham, a member of the JAEA gener-

al assembly, said the associations have been unjustly accused of failing to meet their members' expectations. "There are many complex issues at play, in all of our associations," he said. "There is the issue of the failure of the peace process to deliver what was promised, there is the story of [the effect on Jordan of sanctions against] Iraq. The government cannot just blame the councils for not advancing the associations. We are not working with ideal conditions."

For these reasons, he said, members have little faith that any new council, regardless of its political trend, would be able to seriously address their concerns.

"The fact is that Jordan is facing major problems, so the council, no matter which one, operates in unsuitable conditions, and as such cannot be that effective," he says. "Therefore, one cannot blame just the council for our unemployment or our low salaries."

Roughly 30 per cent of agricultural engineers are employed in the public sector and another 30 in the private sector. The remainder are unemployed. The average salary of an agricultural engineer is JD120.

what's going on

AMMAN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

- * Dramatic reading: "I'm Thinking of You" at Osama Al Mashini Theatre, Abdali at 6:00 p.m.
- * Indonesian play "Ramayana" and French play "100 Mobiles à Part 1" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 7:30 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. respectively.

LECTURES

- * Presentation of the Spanish translation of a book entitled "Sirat Madina: Amman in the 40s" at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman at 6:00 p.m.
- * Syria's Role in the Peace Process in the Middle East" (in Arabic) by Dr. Volker Perthes at the Institute of Diplomacy at 3:00 p.m.
- * "Europe, the United States, and Peace in the Middle East" by Dr. Volker Perthes at the Institute of Diplomacy on Monday March 30 at 3:00 p.m.
- * "The Islamic Movement and Political Action in Jordan Over Half a Century" (in Arabic) by Dr. Ismael Farhan at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Jabal Amman on Monday, March 30 at 6:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

- * Book exhibition at the Bishop's School, Jabal Amman, First Circle, until April 2.
- * Paintings on handmade paper at Noor Al Hussein Foundation, off Wadi Saqra St. (Tel. 5699141/2), until April 25.
- * "Colours of Life" at Books@Café (Tel. 837931/2, until March 31).
- * Works by late Iraqi artist Seddiq Ahmad at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5695027), until March 29.
- * Works by Jordanian artist Yousef Baddawi at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh until April 9 (Tel. 4643251/2). Also displaying a private collection of Mamdouh Bisarat entitled "A Vision, An Identity" and works by contemporary Arab artists — "The New Collection."

Japanese security scholar to deliver lecture on U.S.-Japan agreement

lecture on U.S.-Japan agreement

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Japanese embassy has announced that Tadao Takubo, a prominent Japanese scholar on security affairs, will visit Jordan from March 28-31 to deliver a lecture entitled "U.S.-Japan Security Agreement and its Implications to the Middle East," in cooperation with the Institute of Diplomacy, and exchange opinions with Jordanian

scholars and dignitaries, according to a Japanese embassy press release.

Dr. Takubo graduated from Waseda University in 1956 and received L.L.D from Keio University. As a professor at Kyorin University, he has won an extraordinary reputation in international politics and international relations, writing several books and articles, the statement said.

He has also worked in

journalism, starting as a correspondent of the Jiji Press and, in 1997, he received Seiron Taisho, a prize for excellence in journalism, according to the announcement.

The Embassy of Japan expressed its deepest appreciation to the Institute of Diplomacy for providing support to his visit to this country.

PPD bars entry of 56 books from Israel

By Ahmad Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Press and Publications Department (PPD) has banned the entry of 56 books from Israel because they mock Islamic and Arab culture and history, according to PPD Director Bilal Tal.

Mr. Tal stated that the decision was made on a purely legal basis, without regard to the source of the books.

"Once again, I emphasise that we are implementing the law, which is clear, and according to it, we cannot allow the entry of books that degrade God and Prophet Mohammad," Mr. Tal told the Jordan Times. "Other issues in the books do not have any relation to Arab history and culture."

However, Mahmoud Khalili, the owner of

Khalili Publishing House and the importer of the books, said there is a Jordanian-Israeli agreement to promote cultural exchanges between the two countries. He said he applied to the PPD to publish a number of educational and cultural books on Arab art, in addition to some scientific issues.

"The ban does not make any sense," Mr. Khalili told the Jordan Times. "It is not logical that all 56 books contain passages humiliating to Islam. Why don't they just remove the parts that they don't like, as they always do?" he asked.

"I'm totally aware of the Press and Publication Law, but in my opinion, the whole case is politically motivated and has nothing to do with the law," said Mr. Khalili, who started the publishing business four

years ago.

According to a report in Al Bilad weekly, some political parties expressed relief with the ban of the Israeli books, saying that it was a wise move to protect young people's minds from dangerous ideas that might be found in such books.

Mr. Tal stated that the PPD law does not discriminate between local, Arab, and foreign media, adding that all are treated equally when it comes to what they are not allowed to do.

"The court is the final judge in such cases," Mr. Tal said.

The PPD, established in 1977, supervises nearly 4,134 media foundations in the Kingdom, including publishing houses, shops renting video cassettes, Internet cafes and advertising agencies.

INLA guerrillas claim murder of ex-policeman

BELFAST (R) — The Irish republican INLA guerrilla splinter group said Saturday it had shot dead a former policeman in Northern Ireland Friday night.

The Irish National Liberation Army said its members were responsible for killing Cyril Stewart, 52, in a supermarket car park in the city of Armagh, 50km southwest of Belfast.

The breakaway Irish nationalist militant group, which has never joined in the ceasefire called by Northern Ireland's main republican and Protestant guerrilla groups, has been behind a spate of bomb and mortar attacks in Armagh in recent weeks.

Stewart, who was married, was the 17th victim of violence by Protestant loyalist and Roman Catholic republican militias since late December.

Violence by rival dissi-

dent forces since Christmas is widely seen as a bid to drive a wedge between politicians trying to meet an April 9 deadline for resolving decades of strife in the British-ruled province.

Protestant politician William Smith accused republican hardliners Saturday of trying to provoke retaliatory strikes by pro-British "loyalist" extremists in order to wreck the fragile peace process.

"We would see this as an attack by republicans which is designed to draw loyalists into the fray and to undermine the whole peace process," Mr. Smith, a peace negotiator for the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), told BBC radio.

"What we are seeing now is that the closer we get to (talks) agreement, we are seeing an amalgamation of all the forces that are against the process," Mr.

Smith said.

"Those on the loyalist side and those on the republican side are now doing everything in their power to bring the whole process down."

The PUP is the political arm of the Ulster volunteer force, which called a ceasefire in October, 1994.

Republican splinter groups say the talks, which are sponsored by Britain and Ireland, will entrench the border rather than remove it, which is their goal.

Pro-British "loyalist" dissidents have attacked Roman Catholic nationalists. They argue that the talks weaken the province's links with Britain and will set it on a course for union with the rest of the island.

Friday's killing was denounced by ministers who are spearheading the joint British-Irish peace

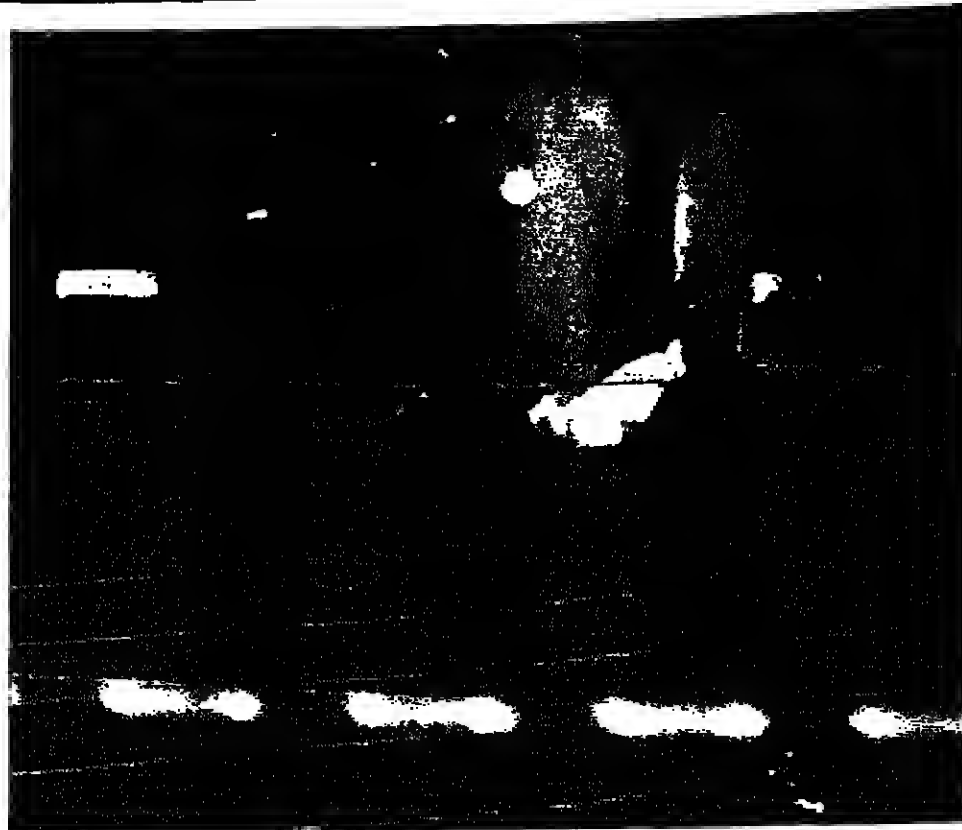
effort.

Britain's Northern Ireland secretary, Mo Mowlam, described the murder as contemptible.

David Andrews, Ireland's foreign minister, said a way must be found to end the province's "catalogue of pain."

Seamus Mallon, a Catholic nationalist negotiator in the peace talks who lives in county Armagh, urged the entire community to condemn the "cowardly act of murder."

A bomb exploded outside the home of a woman prison officer near portadown town late Friday but no one was hurt. The attack was blamed on the loyalist volunteer force, the chief anti-peace process Protestant militia, which earlier threatened to take "direct action" in a dispute with prison authorities.



Police scientists examine the scene around the body of a retired policeman shot dead in a shopping centre car park. Cyril Stewart, 52, was leaving the centre with his wife when two gunmen murdered him (Reuters photo)

Chinese dissidents urge clemency for Wang Bingzhang

BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese dissidents Saturday urged the U.S. government to be lenient towards activist Wang Bingzhang who was arrested in New York Friday for passport fraud.

"Of course, everyone should respect the laws of the country they are in, but in this case I hope that the U.S. government will take some things into consideration," Beijing-based dissident Xu Wenli said.

Wang Bingzhang is a Chinese citizen but he is not allowed to enter China because of persecution from the Chinese government, he told AFP. A second dissident in the eastern city of Nanjing placed the blame for the incident entirely on the Chinese authorities.

"If the Chinese government allowed Wang Bingzhang to enter China or gave him a passport then none of this would have happened," said Xu Shuliang.

Mr. Wang, 50, was detained by Hong Kong officials a week ago as he tried to enter the territory from the neighbouring Portuguese-run territory of Macau with a fake U.S. passport.

He was sent back to Macau after six hours and then flew to Taiwan, and back to the United States, where he was arrested.

Taiwan's immigration authorities said Saturday they had been alerted to "problems" over Mr.

Wang's passport during his six-day stay on the island, but had taken no immediate action because he was not considered a security risk.

"As soon as he came here, we started checking if his passport had been altered. While we were still checking on it, he had already left the country," Interior Minister Huang Chu-Wen said.

He said the immigration authorities allowed Mr. Wang to enter the island despite suspicions over his fake passport because "we knew he is a dissident, a sensitive figure but not a terrorist." According to the U.S. State Department Mr. Wang is a U.S. immigrant with the right to live and work in the United States but said he does not have citizenship.

If he is convicted of misusing a U.S. passport he could face a stiff maximum fine and prison term. In late January, Mr. Wang slipped into China via Macau using an alias — he was on a list of activists to be refused entry into China.

His intention was to organise an internal opposition party to the ruling Communists, but after a two-week manhunt he was arrested and deported.

Mr. Wang has been a staunch critic of China for the past 15 years.

He founded the "China Spring" magazine after moving to the United States and also the Alliance for

Democracy, the first organization of Chinese dissidents abroad.

Speaking at a press conference in Taipei last week, Mr. Wang said an opposition party aimed at promoting democracy in the mainland had been set up in China despite government attempts to block it.

"The Democracy and Justice Party has been established in China by a group of democracy activists," Mr. Wang said.

"After I was expropriated to the United States, representatives have convened meetings in the mainland separately announcing the formation of the party."

Meanwhile, Chinese dissidents called Saturday for the release of Shanghai activist Yang Qinheng, 44, whose family was told Friday that he had been sentenced to three years of reform through labour.

Outspoken dissident Qin Yongmin sent letters to Chinese President Jiang Zemin and U.N. Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson urging action to secure his release.

The dissident's younger brother, Yang Qianming, said authorities alleged his brother had stirred up social unrest by reading an open letter on Radio Free Asia on Jan. 27, in which he condemned China's policy on unemployment and argued for the right to form free trade unions.

Suicide and accidental

Pakistan seeks cutoff of arms supplies to all Afghan factions

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Pakistan has proposed an embargo on arms supplies to all factions in Afghanistan and will pursue it through diplomatic efforts, a foreign office spokesman said Saturday.

An arms cutoff, along with strict and permanent monitoring of major overland, air and water routes, will help promote peace in Afghanistan, the spokesman told a press briefing.

"We will be urging all parties to consider this constructive proposal," the spokesman said, refusing to go into the question of who was providing arms to whom in Afghanistan.

He said a monitoring mechanism, possibly under the United Nations, could be worked out once the embargo was decided.

During a visit here this week the head of the Taliban caretaker governing council in Kabul, Mullah Muhammad Rabbani, accused Iran and several Central Asian republics of arming northern opponents of the Islamic militia.

The spokesman sounded optimistic about the ongoing diplomatic efforts to open the peace process between the Taliban and the alliance battling the Islamic warriors.

The new peace offensive got under way with the arrival here of U.N. special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi along with a representative of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Mr. Brahimi has held "intensive" consultations with the Pakistan government, besides meeting senior Taliban officials. He will also hold talks with the northern alliance and governments in other states neighbouring Afghanistan.

The Taliban militia has proposed the creation of a steering committee comprising 6-7 people from both sides to work for conveying broader political talks to resolve the Afghan conflict.

"It is a very important development," the spokesman said, adding the steering committee could thrash out all aspects, including a format and timeframe for negotiations.

Chernomyrdin to make presidential bid

MOSCOW (AFP) — Sacked Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said Saturday he would contest presidential elections to succeed Boris Yeltsin in the year 2000.

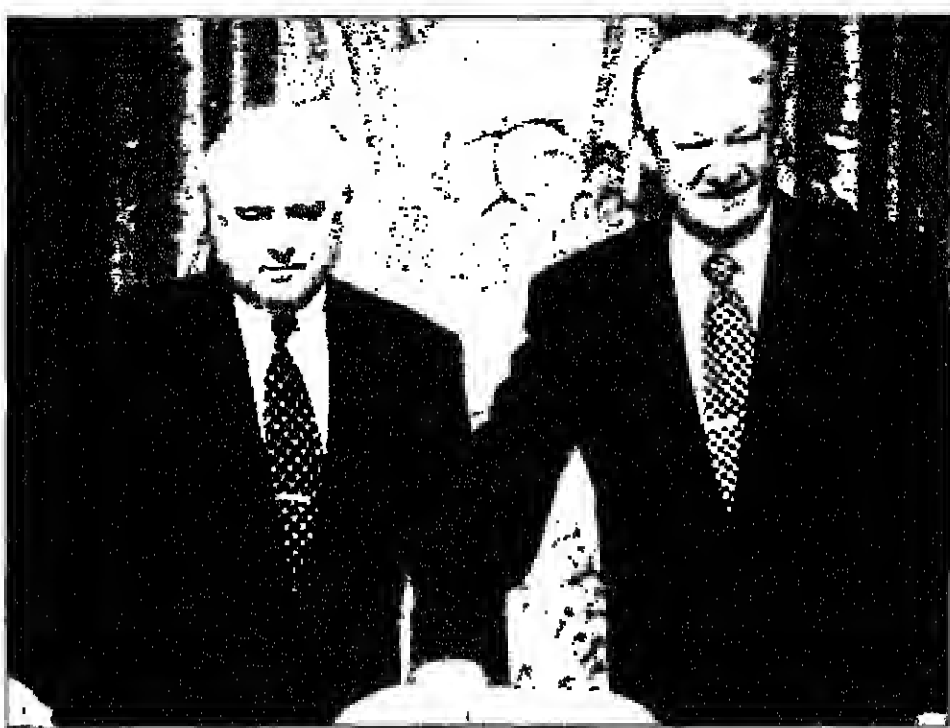
Mr. Chernomyrdin, 60 next month, had served as premier for more than five years and was seen as a loyal Mr. Yeltsin supporter, before he was dismissed by the president Monday.

His announcement that he would run in the 2000 polls was made in a television interview to be broadcast later Saturday, news agencies said.

After dismissing the government Monday, Mr. Yeltsin said he had told Mr. Chernomyrdin to focus on preparations for the presidential elections, but it was not clear whether the president regarded Mr. Chernomyrdin as his chosen successor.

Saturday's announcement appeared to mark a turnaround in Mr. Chernomyrdin's declared position. Immediately after his dismissal, he had said he did not regard himself as a candidate to succeed Mr. Yeltsin.

Seen as a representative of the industrial lobby, Mr. Chernomyrdin was appointed prime minister in December 1992 in a compromise move by Mr. Yeltsin, who was then fac-



Former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin (left), seen next to President Boris Yeltsin in this file photo, said Saturday he had decided to run in the next presidential election, due in 2000, Russian news agencies reported (Reuters photo)

ing strong anti-reform opposition from parliament.

Mr. Chernomyrdin could secure strong big business backing for a presidential bid but his grey technocratic image is an electoral handicap and he would have to develop more charisma to impress voters, analysts say.

He served as deputy minister for the gas industry under Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1982, and rose to become minister of the

same sector under Mikhail Gorbachev.

An expert in economic management with a reputation as a pragmatist, Mr. Chernomyrdin enjoys the trust of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by rigorously pursuing financial stabilisation.

But he is also seen in Russia as belonging to the clique of "red directors" — former Communist apparatchiks who reaped the

windfalls of mass privatisation while millions of Russians faced economic hardship.

Mr. Yeltsin praised Mr. Chernomyrdin's record this week, saying: "He has done a lot for the country."

So far only nationalist ex-General Alexander Lebed and liberal reformer Grigory Yavlinsky have announced publicly that they will run for the presidency.

Hundreds protest at return of Prince Ranariddh

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — More than 1,000 demonstrators took to the streets of Phnom Penh Saturday to protest against the planned return next week of deposed Cambodian co-premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

Between 600 and 800 marchers with police protection blocked traffic on the main roads in the capital, their numbers swelling as they progressed to about 1,200 witnesses said.

In Bangkok, Prince Ranariddh's cabinet in exile which is now preparing his scheduled return Monday, dismissed the demonstration as the opinion of a vocal minority.

"The vast majority of the people are cheering and waiting with open arms for the prince," said Kong Vibol, a close aide to the prince.

"It's only a small minority of a few hundred people who are taking part in this protest, but our advance team has told us clearly that most Khmer people

can't wait for the prince to return."

It was unclear who organised the demonstration and one man with a megaphone who appeared to be shouting instructions to the crowd declined to answer any questions. "This is our right of free speech," he said.

Many of the protesters carried signs in English and Khmer proclaiming "Politicians must respect the political party law" and "How will Prince Ranariddh resolve the anarchic forces?"

The signs were references to the prince's resistance army and its top commanders who, unlike Prince Ranariddh, have not received pardons from King Norodom Sihanouk and whose future is uncertain.

Under the political parties law, parties may not control troops or maintain autonomous zones — a restriction which may keep the prince from standing in an election scheduled for July and subject him to criminal

penalties.

Diplomats and analysts are concerned that unless at least two of the prince's senior generals — Nhek Bun Chhay and Serei Kosol — receive pardons, a Japanese-backed peace plan aimed at ensuring that the election is free and fair may fail.

A military court earlier this month sentenced the two generals and the prince in absentia to decades in prison on charges of colluding with the outlawed Khmer Rouge guerrilla faction and arms smuggling.

Late Friday, chief government spokesman Khieu Kanharith rejected speculation that powerful Second Prime Minister Hun Sen, who effectively ousted the prince last July but appealed to King Sihanouk to pardon him, would approve pardons for the two generals.

"We do not mind that Prince Ranariddh is coming back," said one marcher who identified himself as Muth. "But we are worried about more fighting,

Nhek Bun Chhay and Serei Kosol should not be allowed. They are with the Khmer Rouge."

In a related development, a man claiming to represent several hundred of the prince's troops in the resistance-held town of Samlot in western Cambodia, said he and his men had defected to the government.

"We are tired of fighting," Kheng Savon told reporters in Phnom Penh.

There was no immediate response to the alleged defection from the prince but his resistance general staff said in a statement Saturday that government troops, backed by five tanks, had attacked Samlot Thursday and Friday sending thousands of civilians fleeing.

It said the attack, along with two others, was a "clear violation" of the ceasefire agreed to by both sides under the Japanese plan.

Man's initials can affect long life, study

NEW ORLEANS (R) — There's more than just irony involved in men's initials that form acronyms like P.I.G., B.U.M. and U.G.H. — they don't live as long as those with initials like V.I.P. and W.I.N., a California researcher said Friday.

A study of death certificates shows that men whose initials have negative connotations died an average of 2.8 years sooner than the control group, those whose initials were meaningless.

Nicholas Christenfeld, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at the University of California at San Diego, told Reuters.

Negative initials appeared to have no impact on women, he said. He said the study focused on males because

they typically retain their initials throughout their lives.

Men with positive initials lived an average of 4.48 years longer than the control group, while women in the same category lived 3.36 years longer, he said.

The research was presented Friday at the 19th annual meeting of the society of behavioural medicine, an organisation that focuses on the role of behaviour and psychosocial conditions on human disease.

Prof. Christenfeld and fellow researchers identified 19 sets of "negative" initials and 12 sets of "positive" initials before examining the death certificates of people who died in California from 1969 to 1995.

They separated out and

compared death certificate information on non-Hispanic white males because they were the largest group, he said.

"We found 2,287 negative initials like D.I.E., R.A.T., B.U.M. and A.S.S., and 1,200 with positive initials like A.C.E., W.O.W., J.O.Y. and G.O.D.," he said.

Prof. Christenfeld said researchers also studied major causes of death to determine if any difference in longevity between groups was particularly strong for some diseases and they compared the prevalence of some diseases among the groups.

The study found that those with positive initials died later and from different diseases than those with positive initials and the control group.

Suicide and accidental

deaths — the two types he said are most affected by psychological states — were higher in the negative group, Prof. Christenfeld said.

He said the study's findings cannot be explained by the confounding effects of gender, race, year of death, socioeconomic status or parental neglect.

"It now appears, rather surprisingly, that the names our parents give us can also alter the cause and timing of death," he said.

"People are usually pretty careful not to name their kid knucklehead, but I guess it's easy for parents not to notice what's happening with the initials. They need to watch that."

Southwestern Philippines forest fires send tribesmen fleeing

MANILA (R) — Forest fires are spreading across the southwestern Philippines island of Palawan, forcing tribespeople to flee and threatening endangered species, officials said Saturday.

Palawan, the Philippines' so-called last frontier, is home to

endangered animals such as the tarsier, the world's smallest primate, and rare plants.

"The fires have been raging for almost five days now. Some houses belonging to indigenous people were burned," Ricardo Sandalo, head of Palawan Tropical Forestry Protection, told

Reuters.

Disaster officials said up to 5,000 hectares of forest lands in the southern part of the island were caused by El Niño. In some areas, it was due to slash-and-burn farming.

Palawan governor Salvador Socrates told reporters in Puerto Princesa, the island's capital.

Meteorologists said

most parts of the country have had little rain since last April because of El Niño.

Officials said the biggest fires were near the mountain towns of Rizal and Quezon.

Residents said some 25 houses in Rizal, mostly belonging to tribespeople, have been razed. Mr.

Sandalo said.

"Visibility is very poor so it's hard to determine the damage," said Vic de Leon, head of the forestry division of Palawan tropical.

"I do not know if some rare animals have been affected by the fires. But a rare plant species is found in the forests of

Rizal and Quezon towns."

Palawan has forest cover of some 1.2 million hectares, said Antonio Principe, regional director of the department of environment and natural resources.

"The local government and residents here are trying to organise more

teams to contain the fires," Mr. Sandalo said.

"Some residents are trying to contain the fires now using spray cans."

Palawan disaster coordinating council spokesman Rolando Bonoan said the fires continued to spread because of the lack of firefighting equipment.

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Ideas before plan, or is it?

IT IS becoming apparent that what U.S. envoy Dennis Ross is carrying on this visit to the region is only some "ideas" for the consideration of both Israel and the Palestinians. We hear that Ross wants merely to reactivate the stalled peace talks between them and not necessarily unveil a grand plan for their ultimate success. The plan will crystallise, it seems, only after the restarted negotiations are concluded and their results presented to President Bill Clinton.

We would have thought that assessing the positions of the two sides has already been done and that now is the time to put forward the long-awaited American initiative. The Palestinians have been led to believe that the stage of sending feelers is behind us already paving the way for submitting the new plan. But instead Washington appears to be seeking the endorsement of its ideas first by Israel and later by the Palestinians before the initiative can be announced formally. Which does not augur well for meeting the expectations that the U.S. will advance its own initiative no matter what the pressures.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is busy resisting demands for a sizeable Israeli withdrawal on the pretext that a 13 per cent redeployment, as Washington is proposing, would compromise the security of Jewish settlements, and even Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport. The Israeli leader is on record, therefore, as offering a one and only 9 per cent withdrawal before final status talks can begin.

It strikes us as preposterous to suggest that a mere 13 per cent withdrawal would put Israel's security at risk in two major areas. Netanyahu knows only too well that when final status negotiations are concluded, withdrawals would have to be much larger than the extent of 13 per cent envisaged by the Americans. If Netanyahu calculates that a modest pullback now would jeopardise his country's security, what is he going to do when the question of land-for-peace has to be discussed in its entirety?

The Israeli government has to get serious, or this chance for peace will disappear for a long time to come. It has to make the necessary hard decisions. The Palestinians made them when they agreed to the Oslo accords. It is incumbent on Israel to move in that direction, now, by enabling Dennis Ross to return home once again empty-handed.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Arab Al Yawm's Riyadh Hroub Saturday said the U.N. secretary general recently announced that the U.S. is indebted to the world organisation by \$500 million and its failure to pay its dues could lead to it being deprived of the right to vote. In short the U.S. is in violation of the U.N. and its various agencies and so it is to be considered ineligible to serve as a mediator for the world organisation, he said. In this light the U.S. has no right to play the role of the world's police or threaten to attack Iraq with a mandate from the U.N., according to the writer. In various organisations a defaulting member is deprived of taking part in their meetings or to have a say in voting on decisions, and as such at the U.N., the U.S. has no right to act for the world organisation in waging war on Iraq, imposing sanctions on Libya and Sudan and claiming to be defending the cause of justice, he added. Since the U.S. indebted to the U.N. organisation it should not have the right to vote in the Security Council against Iraq or to veto any resolution condemning Israel's actions in the occupied Arab lands, he continued. The U.S. administration should not only be regarded as adopting a double standard policy but also as a cheat, not eligible to play the role of peace broker.

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek said it is not possible for Jordan to become self-sufficient in various food items and the Kingdom has to depend on imports of certain commodities that cannot be produced locally. To ensure food security as some economists advocate the Jordanians should produce particular products demanded by markets here and abroad and with the income buy items it cannot produce itself. Being affiliated to the European Union as an associate and since it has adopted an open market economy, Jordan can only depend on an exchange of trade to meet its requirement of food and other commodities, stressed the writer. Citing the example of Japan, the writer said the Asian country imports oil, iron and numerous other commodities, which it does not have and exports manufactured goods whose earning finance the purchase of food which it does not produce. The policy of trying to secure food by growing it locally can never help the Jordanian economy, according to the writer who quoted an agricultural expert as saying that Jordan would need to grow cereal on every bit of cultivable land to meet the growing needs of the Jordanian people, but in this case, he added, Jordan would not be producing any other agricultural product.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

How to use privatisation proceeds

By Dr. Fahed Fanek

IF THE negative responses towards privatisation, made by the majority of parliament members (MPs), did not kill the privatisation programme, it will at least slow down the process, and may at the same time ease the pressure on the government, exerted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, to speed up the process.

But both the few supporters and the many opposers of privatisation agree the government must eventually withdraw from certain economic activities and transfer them to the private sector. They do, however, differ on the extent to which the process should go, on the scale of priorities that should be adopted by the government, on the timetable for implementation, and on the projects that constitute strategic activities that must be exempted from the process to remain in the public sector domain. The concept of strategic partner was unanimously rejected out of hand, especially when it comes to a company like the Jordan Cement Factories Company, a well managed entity which can be sold gradually to Jordanian investors.

What we are interested in here is the best way to utilise the proceeds of privatisation, which could be in the tens or hundreds of millions of JDs. Some observers worry that the government may use the proceeds to finance its recurring expenditure. Others think that reinvesting the funds by the government is counterproductive because it

means a return to the public sector as an investor and to bureaucrats as managers of businesses, which is contrary to the very concept of privatisation. The question therefore should be resolved in advance in an acceptable and agreed manner.

The government, represented by Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Jawad Anani, came up with the innovative idea of a fund for future generations, which means saving the proceeds for the future. This sounds like a good and appealing idea, but it does not make sense in a country which lacks capital. There is no guarantee that the next government will not take the liberty of using such funds in the event circumstances arise, as happened to the Kuwait fund for generations which was drawn to finance American troop build-up against Iraq. Having a fat fund saved for the future may deny us the right to ask for Arab or foreign aid or, for that matter, to ask creditors to give us any kind of relief.

It may be too luxurious to differ on how to use the proceeds of privatisation in a country where the central government's budget depends heavily on external borrowing to finance deficits and make ends meet, or in a country where infrastructure is lacking and the volume of investments unable to create enough jobs to cope with unemployment.

The best way to use the proceeds of privatisation is to

build a modern infrastructure, which should be publicly owned, because the private sector is not interested, such as dams and highways. We can also prepay debts carrying commercial interest rates including buy-back of Jordanian sovereign bonds circulating in the market at a discount instead of leaving them to the coming generations. Finally the government can turn over the proceeds to the Central Bank especially when the treasury is heavily indebted to the Central Bank and must repay its debt from a non-recurring source which will support the reserves of the Central Bank and relieve it from having to sell certificates of deposits (CDs) at a high cost in order to absorb excess liquidity in the market which was created by government withdrawing on the Central Bank during the eighties. The Iraqi debt of \$1.2 billion should also be the Ministry of Finance's responsibility and not carried in the balance sheet of the Central Bank, not to mention Royal Jordanian airline's huge debts guaranteed by the treasury.

The Central Bank foreign exchange reserves can accomplish the job of a fund for future generations, it can support private sector investments and strengthen public confidence in the economy. A sizeable reserve with the Central Bank is a prerequisite for monetary stability, sustainable economic growth, and national independence.

Letter from Belfast

Behind the bad press on Robin Cook

By Peter Hinchcliffe

JUDGED BY the number of column inches the Middle East has once again dominated the foreign news pages of the more serious British press. For once it was not Saddam who stole the headlines but British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook. This was of course because of his confrontation with radical Israeli settlers on Jabal Abu Ghneim or Har Homa, which attracted massive coverage on television as well as in the newspapers. The actual stormy confrontational scenes and all might almost have been overlooked had it not been for the astonishingly ferocious reaction of the Israeli government. Accusations of dishonestly reneging on previous agreements and the cancellation of an official dinner for Mr. Cook by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were prominently reported. And all kinds of different conclusions drawn by the usual suspects pumpled up from amongst the resident corps of "Middle East experts" who are always trotted out for a brief sound bite on these occasions. The dust is only now beginning to settle. The press has moved on to other (mostly domestic) topics. Old news is no news.

Mr. Cook has been portrayed as a controversial figure in British politics and does not always enjoy good press. He has the reputation in some (mostly opposition Conservative Party) quarters of being accident-prone. His personal life — he has just parted from his wife after 25 years of marriage — has been held against him but the main charge is one of upsetting too many important foreigners to the detriment of British interests. One journalist wrote that he had committed a "capital offence" for a diplomat by "offending both sides at once."

In this case offensive behaviour not only on behalf of the U.K. but also the European Union (EU) whose presidency Britain currently holds. Words like "fiasco" and "diplomatic disaster" proliferated. Readers were reminded of Queen Elizabeth's visit to Pakistan and India last year when Mr. Cook had upset the Indians by an allegedly "clumsy foray" into the Kashmir dispute thus plunging an avowedly apolitical (to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of India and Pakistan's independence) Royal visit into over-hyped controversy.

Also as far as the Har Homa/Jabal Abu Ghneim incident was concerned some of the press speculated that this would jeopardise the relationship between Mr. Cook and Prime Minister Tony Blair — to whom Mr. Netanyahu had apparently complained about the Foreign Secretary's behaviour. Mr. Blair is visiting Israel in April to mark another half-century celebration. Some journalists suggested that the prime minister would have to grovel to his Israeli opposite number, and beg forgiveness for Mr. Cook's bad behaviour.

It's a pity but, I fear inevitable, given the nature of the British press — any press in a democratic society — that issues get obscured by personalities and party politics. Cut-throat media competition is another factor. With a few honourable exceptions it is not the primary purpose of the average journalist to inform the reader. Distortion and sensationalised controversy sell papers. Cool objective analysis does not. But in this case, discounting much of the rhetoric, the issues shone through clearly enough. If Mr. Cook got bad press, Mr. Netanyahu got it worse one as far as the substance of what the fuss was all about was concerned.

I have mentioned in previous "letters"

that in recent years the balance of public sympathy as measured by British press commentaries on "Arab/Israel" has dramatically shifted in favour of the Arabs — specifically the Palestinians. Little to do with the success of the traditionally fairly ineffectual "Arab lobby" (although they have improved) and despite the best efforts of the much better organised pro-Israeli pressure groups. Rather the personal achievement of one man — Bibi Netanyahu — with the active assistance of the more baritone members of his government. Jabal Abu Ghneim is a classic example of this phenomenon! The more thoughtful newspapers were (admittedly after some reflection) unanimous in blaming the Likud government for Mr. Cook's misadventures. As Rupert Cornwell wrote in the Independent on March 19: "Ultimately the blame for the mess lies with the Israelis: not so much the bigots who daub 'anti-Semitism' on the walls of the British consulate, but a right-wing government that insists on its right to build settlements as and when it pleases."

Another commentator on the point about the ability of Europe to mediate in the peace process suggested that the only mediator that was acceptable to Mr. Netanyahu was one who would not be so unkind as to criticise him and would agree with everything he did! There was also a widespread belief (shared in official circles if my informants are to be believed) that the whole incident was orchestrated by the Israeli prime minister (and hyped out of all proportion) to strengthen his personal position with his own right wing. As for mediation generally, and many people feel that Europe should play a more prominent role, Rupert Cornwell wrote:

"No, the plain truth is that as long as Mr. Netanyahu remains prime minister of Israel and pursues his current policies, neither Britain nor the European Union — regarded as incorrigibly pro-Palestinian — nor even the United States have a hope of brokering a deal acceptable to both sides. Indeed the Netanyahu snub may be taken as a warning to the U.S. of what might happen, should Washington press too hard on the settlements. If Mr. Cook's 'diplomatic disaster' has illuminated to the world just how inflexible Israel is, then so much the better."

That is a depressing thought. There is little point in highlighting Mr. Netanyahu's "inflexibility" if no one — not even Washington — will (or can) do anything about it. Inflexibility by one party should not be used as a pretext for not trying. I very much hope that Mr. Blair — battling for Europe as well as Britain can do something to change Israeli attitudes in the interests of peace. The Labour Party in Britain has traditionally enjoyed friendly ties with Israel — as the Board of Deputies of British Jews crossly reminded Mr. Cook on his return from the region. So actually has Europe. If Mr. Netanyahu does not listen to his friends in the wider world he, and Likud, may come to regret it one day. Can European economic sanctions — as a major Israeli trading partner be ruled out?

We return to Scotland soon. Next letter from there. Hopefully in the wake of Tony Blair's trip. Abu Ghneim is not on his itinerary. But another settlement may be. Let's see.

The writer, a retired diplomat and was British ambassador to Jordan. He contributed this article to the Jordan Times.

MENABank officials say start-up hinges on congressional green light

By George S. Hishmeh

WASHINGTON — If the United States is not having much luck at present with its often-trumpeted "plan" to revive the comatose Middle East peace process, it is not faring better in injecting new life into another important component of the process, the Middle East-North African economic conferences.

The annual economic conferences, sometimes held at summit level, were launched more than five years ago in Casablanca with high expectations that Arabs and Israelis will together build a "new Middle East" in tandem with the new peace edifice encompassing the vast region.

But with the hack sliding that has occurred ever since Benjamin Netanyahu took over the premiership of Israel, the multilateral process has had its own unpublishable setbacks. At the last MENA economic conference, held in November in Doha, Qatar, most of the Arab countries boycotted this bid at economic normalisation with Israel. As a result, no Arab state accepted to host the 1998 conference.

Consequently, it was then decided that the working group comprising the four core parties of the Middle East peace process — Jordan, Egypt, Israel and the Palestinians — the hosts of all the previous MENA conferences as well as Canada, Japan, the European Union and the United States will get together at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos,

Switzerland, in January to agree on the venue of the next meeting. The forum is the organiser of the conferences.

But that Davos meeting turned out to be inconclusive and neither the World Economic Forum nor the U.S. State Department would engage in any discussion for the record about the failure at Davos. The excuse is that behind-the-scenes efforts are still under way in the hope that an Arab country will step forward and offer to host next year's conference, which usually takes place in November.

U.S. officials nonetheless have not given up, and another meeting of the working group is expected next month in Washington in yet another try at settling this embarrassment. Tunisia or Oman remain the likely sites for the conference.

Those American officials dealing directly with the MENA economic process argue that the countries of the Middle East and North Africa ought to take a cue from Europe which has been more successful during the post-World War II period at coordinating economic and trade policies than achieving political unity.

In order to give the economic process a much-needed push, the Clinton administration has recently sponsored two trips to Washington of the transition team that has been engaged in setting up the so-called MENABank or the Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development in the Middle East and North Africa. The fledgling

bank, the flagship of the MENA economic process, has been undergoing severe labour pains in Cairo, which serves as its headquarters.

The transition team, led by former U.S. Ambassador David J. Dunford, is composed of members from the United States, Japan, the Netherlands, Italy, Canada, Egypt and Israel.

It is estimated that the Middle East will need about \$500 billion over the next 10 years to maintain a five per cent growth rate.

As a result of the two promotional visits to Washington, the second completed last week and which included presentations before congressional budgetary committees, financial institutions and think-tanks, senior U.S. officials are now more optimistic about the chances of U.S. funding in the next fiscal year. The U.S. budgetary process, which began in February, lasts until the fall.

At present, the United States is only providing funding for the transition team but as the largest shareholder it has yet to make a

contribution to cover its 21 per cent share of the bank's budget. The United States has promised to come up with a meager \$52 million a year for the next five years. The initial capitalisation of the bank will be \$5 billion, with one quarter paid in.

The MENABank officials are of the opinion that once the U.S. Congress gives the green light, they can begin operations soon thereafter. In fact, some U.S. observers believe that in order to speed matters up and considering the reluctance of the U.S. Congress to dish out additional economic assistance, Israel and Egypt could forego an amount equal to the U.S. share to help start the ball rolling. Actually that's what happened when Jordan last year needed additional U.S. economic aid.

According to Ambassador Dunford, who served as his country's envoy to Oman, the MENABank has a private-sector focus, including authority to lend to borrowers without a sovereign guarantee, that is, without any guarantee that the loan will be repaid if necessary by the government of the country in which the borrower is located. The only other bank that can do that is the International Finance Corporation, a World Bank affiliate.

Other shareholders in the bank include the four core peace process parties and Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, each holding four per cent. Russia, Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, Canada, Turkey and Greece have also sub-

scribed. Twenty five percent of the capital is being reserved for countries that may join once the bank begins operations. Ambassador Dunford noted that China is one of those countries but he said that membership by Arab Gulf states may not happen any time soon.

Ambassador Dunford said the bank will focus on regional projects, varying in size between \$10 million and \$1 billion. Among the projects he cited, during a talk at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, were a deep sea port at Port Said for transshipping containers; a Dead Sea Water Treatment and Production Facility, a Wadi Araba Wind Power project, and a Middle East Credit Reporting Company in Egypt. Israel is the only country in the Middle East that has a credit reporting agency.

It is estimated that the Middle East will need about \$500 billion over the next 10 years to maintain a five per cent growth rate. But the region today receives only one per cent of global foreign direct investment and the amount of concessional official financing flowing to the region is reportedly on the decline. MENABank hopes that through co-financing with other public and private financial institutions as well as private investments it will use its \$5 billion capital base to leverage a much greater flow of private resources.

In the final analysis, all this is dependant on movement in the peace process which to date does not seem very promising.

The unknown future of the State of Israel

Following is the second and last part of an essay by Marc Ellis entitled, *The Boundaries of Destiny: Mapping Oslo and the future of the Jewish people*. The first part was published in the Jordan Times yesterday.

IN GERMANY, on the verge of the 50th anniversary of Israel, with the map of Israel as it is and will be, I came full circle. The tension I felt among Germans and within myself a decade earlier, the tension of the suffering of the past and the call to the present, was broken. I decided that the discussion about Jews in Germany is not about Jews, but about Germans and Germany and how they will make their way into the future. The actuality of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust is a symbolic marker, albeit a horrifying one, through which different political and ideological factions within Germany argue their positions. So too in the Jewish world. The boundaries of Israel have expanded through a political and military process that often calls upon the victims of the Holocaust as reminders of the possibility of weakness and disempowerment. But in securing power at the expense of Palestinians and making the dispossession and the remanifestation of Palestinians permanent, the victims of the Holocaust are symbolic markers as well. For can the permanent dispossession of a people be called for by the survivors of the Holocaust without limiting their own witness to the pain and suffering they experienced? Even more difficult is the ghettoisation of a people in the name of the victims of the Holocaust.

At some point, the claim of emergency, the refusal of accountability, the drawing on the sufferings of the past as justification for oppressing another people in the present, becomes empty. The dead are trivialised, not, as was feared by some post-Holocaust commentators, because every people compared their suffering to that of the Jews, but because the deeds of Israel, with the full support of the Jewish establishments in Europe and America, rendered their memory "usable" in accomplishing the goals all states seek: expansion, hegemony, power. In using the dead as symbolic markers to avoid the complexity and reality of contemporary life, the end of the era of Auschwitz comes into view. That era was about the victims of Auschwitz and other things as well, a complex intermingling of mourning, true repentance, and calculated manipulation. The mixture could be expected, as remembrance is never pure. One must thus establish a boundary for memory so that the cries of the victims will lose their utility, so that they will not be further soiled by the use of their memory for acts that they cannot control and would find difficult to justify.

The boundaries of Israel are not the boundaries established by the suffering Jews of Europe, nor can they be justified in their name. To the side of Sharon's map next to my first note I appended this statement: "Let us declare these boundaries as our own, willingly established, sometimes fought against, and permanent, with all the repercussions for Palestinian life and Jewish life as well." On the 50th anniversary of Israel we have come to an end of the era of Auschwitz and with that we have come to the end of a his-

tory that was severely wounded in the Holocaust. The responsibility is a joint one and both are, from different vantage points, unforgivable: the German and European responsibility for what was thrust upon us so cruelly; the Jewish responsibility for what we did and refused to do in the emergency years after the Holocaust and what we have done and refused to do after the emergency was over. With the passage of time and the assumption of responsibility, Jews are now accountable. The ramifications of this responsibility are enormous and yet must be faced soberly.

The end of the era of Auschwitz, signalled by the boundaries of Israel and the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, means that Jewish history — as we have known and inherited it — has a boundary as well.

The end of the era of Auschwitz, signalled by the boundaries of Israel and the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, means that Jewish history — as we have known and inherited it — has a boundary as well. That boundary places Judaism and Jewish life in the past and to carry it on in the present, as if nothing beyond peripheral change has occurred, is to instrumentalise Jewish life as Israel has done to the Holocaust. If the borders of the state are the borders of Jewish life, what is the road ahead? Does the end of the era of Auschwitz mean more than the end of conventional Jewish life? Does it mean that those who associate with Jewish life in any of its manifestations blaspheme the depth of suffering and struggle that Jews inherit? There are Jews who struggle, without any religious affiliation and often without any Jewish articulation, to tend those wounded by Israeli soldiers, to document human rights violations caused by Israeli law and policies, to live among Palestinians as a sign of solidarity at the end of Jewish history. One wonders if these Jews, unannounced and unheralded, even vilified, without liturgy or mysticism, carry the Jewish covenant into another geography, uncharted, outside the boundaries set by the state and contemporary Jewish life. Is theirs a journey of solidarity and mourning, a refusal of boundaries that defy contemporary Jewish life as the true and only heirs of the past?

Among these few are children of Holocaust survivors. Do they point to a way of true memorialisation and authentic respect for the victims of the Holocaust? Do they honour a past and pave the way for a future that refuses to continue the cycle of violence that ended a history they hold dear? As I left Germany I thought of these lone individuals and saw in their witness the walls of the memorial propos-

al in Berlin, with the faded Hebrew lettering, as a sign of the future. A solitude to be sure, leaving behind the known, propelled by the suffering of Jews and Palestinians, and a solidarity with the victims of power regardless of who they are or what their justification is: a future that leaves behind the covenant and the God who is known and used. Will a new covenant and God be discovered in this journey?

If Jewish history is at an end, who will remember those who journey toward the "other" as a sign of fidelity to the history which is drawing to a close? Preparing for Shabbat after my return from Germany, these thoughts haunted me. For it was at the time of my first journey to Germany, a decade earlier, that Shabbat had taken on a greater importance for me. For years I hesitated because the words of the prayers held meanings I found difficult to affirm. Nonetheless I found the ceremony itself to be important and thus embarked on a regular observance, one that has become increasingly important to me. Yet I have never found Shabbat to be simply a celebration, a time of joy as it is supposed to be. Rather it is a time of reflection and concentration, a time of beholding, and with family, a time of recognition. This has continued and deepened over the years. In coming to observe Shabbat was I preparing for the end that now is evident? Perhaps, like those who crossed the boundaries of the state, Shabbat is my way of focusing on the next arena of struggle, the integration of the remnant Palestinians into Israel with an equal citizenship and with the same rights and responsibilities.

Thus though the external boundaries of the state are in the process of being finalised, internal political, cultural and economic life will be fluid and changing. The incorporation of the "other" into the larger Israel is bound to create pressures and opportunities that are difficult to calculate and control. Could this arena now be the place of the practice of fidelity, where displacement becomes inclusion, and the recognition of a joint history of Jew and Palestinian is boldly asserted? In the long run this means the continual extension of rights until all areas of life are shared between Jews and Palestinians. A binational reality, already existing but not as yet fully actualised, would come into being where both communities recognise one another as worthwhile and contributing to a larger whole.

When [the] oppression [of Palestinians] ends, another understanding of Jews and Judaism will evolve, though what relation it will have to previous history remains to be discerned in the future.

One day the particularities of the Jewish and Palestinian communities might give rise to an identity for both groups that embraces those particularities as it issues into a shared identity that also transcends both. Unless we believe in a generic propensity for separatism, shared geography, conflict and possibility, especially with the boundaries of Israel

as they stand today, will inevitably bring this new identity into existence. The Jewishness experienced there and by extension in the West as well, whatever it might be, will not be the Jewishness that we have inherited. A new history will be born, the contours of which are unknown and will be worked out over the centuries.

This new chapter cannot be defined in advance or prepared for, but it must be struggled for in the name of the past, for the principle of justice, and without a desire to preserve what has ended in name and structure. The fidelity of those Jews who have come into solidarity with the Palestinian people at the end of Jewish history must be a fidelity without desire or plan, without hope of rescuing Judaism or the ethical framework which has prompted their solidarity, without preconceived boundaries, even in opposition to those cast by the state. In essence, a new beginning must be struggled for to create a history which may, indeed is likely to, take on a completely different character than is now known to us.

The character of Jewish history has always evolved, and though the consternation over the changing definition of who is a Jew as proposed by the Orthodox in Israel and opposed by those in the Conservative and Reform communities in America, has been vigorous — with of course a corresponding silence on the central issue facing the Jewish world — the real change in Judaism and Jewish life has already been defined by the oppression of the Palestinian people. When that oppression ends, another understanding of Jews and Judaism will evolve, though what relation it will have to previous history remains to be discerned in the future. For this is where we have arrived on the 50th anniversary of statehood.

Celebrating within injustice is as futile as mourning what cannot be retrieved. There is a future beyond injustice and mourning, beyond the boundaries of the present.

The boundaries of our lives have never been and are not now the boundaries of our destiny. Living at and through the end of Jewish history is a challenge few would choose. And yet the context of fidelity is always bequeathed to a generation rather than chosen. What is done with that inheritance is our choice. In turn that choice helps to narrow or expand the possibility of Jewish life to the genera-

tions which follow.

To be in solidarity with the Palestinian people on the 50th anniversary of Israel is a path of fidelity that one day will give birth to a destiny of justice and dignity for Jews and Palestinians, and leave a Jewishness worth bequeathing to those who come after.

The Sabeel Conference in Bethlehem: Hoping against hope

By Dr. A. Clare Brandabur

SABEEL is an organisation shaped by the vision of Father Naim Stefan Ateek, author of *Justice and Only Justice*, designed to foster a theology of liberation for Palestinian Christians. When a friend in Washington e-mailed to me here in Jordan the programme for this year's Sabeel Conference (held from February 11 to 16), I saw that Edward Said was to give the keynote address, and that the programme included Professor Ibrahim Abu-lughod, Father Elias Chacour (author of *Blood Brothers*), Marc Ellis (author of *Beyond Innocence and Redemption*), Professor Rosemary Ruether (co-author of *The Wrath of Jonah*), Reverend Don Wagner (co-author of *All in the Name of the Bible* and founder of the Palestine Human Rights Campaign), Rev. Michael Prior, author of *The Bible & Colonialism* among many other distinguished scholars. I was determined to attend.

The packed auditorium of Bethlehem University on Friday evening February 13, greeted the arrival of Professor Said with a sustained standing ovation, testimony to the sense of history shared by all those present. Bethlehem University's choir performed the familiar hymn to Jerusalem in which many of the audience joined... "and all who would might enter and no one was denied..." praying for a unitary and peaceful Holy City, now a city of bloodshed, ethnic cleansing and apartheid.

Prof. Said's brilliant lecture and his subsequent talk at Birzeit University have been printed and broadcast on TV. In this personal report, I wish to focus on other less publicised sessions of the Sabeel Conference including an exchange of ideas which has particular relevance at this historic moment when the Oslo agreement is being used to speed up the confiscation of Palestinian land and to turn the remnants of the "peace process" into a shameful hoax.

Rev. Prior: Can Christians Worship A Vindictive God who Commands Genocide Against Whole Peoples? Having heard Father Prior present a paper at the Jerusalem Day Conference in Amman in October 1996, I knew the work of this Roman Catholic priest, historian and theologian, who spent last year as a visiting professor at Bethlehem University. Father Prior addresses the vexed problem: for Christians who accept the Old Testament as the revealed

word of God, how are we to confront the repeated commands of Yahweh that his followers massacre entire peoples? This is, Father Prior insists, not merely a permission, but an explicit command. In one instance (First and Second Samuel) a Jewish King incurs the wrath of Yahweh when he fails to exterminate all of the Amalekites, and though he hastily "backs" the Amalekite King to pieces before the Lord, he nonetheless loses his kingship and suffers further punishment when the Lord sends an evil spirit to torment him.

Father Prior's two recently published books were available at the conference: *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*, Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., Mansion House, 19 Kingfield Road, Sheffield S11 9AS, England. A second book edited by Father Prior, *Western Scholarship & The History of Palestine*, contains important essays by fellow participants in the 1996 Jerusalem Day Symposium in Amman: Keith Whitelam (Western Scholarship and the Silencing of Palestinian History), Thomas L. Thompson (Hidden Histories and the Problem of Ethnicity in Palestine), Michael Prior (The Moral Problem of the Land Tradition of the Bible) and John Quigley (The Right of Return of Displaced Jerusalemites). This book also contains in an addendum the authors and titles of papers presented at the Jerusalem Day Symposium held in Amman (except for the first in 1989 which was held in Kuwait) together with the names of members of the Jerusalem Day Committee and the committee's address in Amman from which copies of these papers are available: P.O. Box 940639, Amman 11194, Jordan.

Two Jewish views: The inclusive and the exclusive

Another session dealt with Zionism and Jewish attitudes toward the Holy Land. One of the speakers was Dr. Marc Ellis who spoke of the "end of Jewish history," saying that Israel, in its aggressive and exclusive claim to the Holy Land at the expense of the indigenous Palestinian people, represents a complete break for him with the Jewish tradition into which he had been born and in which he had his education. Ellis favours an inclusive Holy Land in which Arabs — Muslim and Christian — and Jews live together side by side, sharing the land and its

history. Marc Ellis advocates an analogy: in *Beyond Innocence and Redemption* he argues that, just as the Christian European community could not go forward until it had faced and repented its role in the murder and dispossession of Jews, so the Jewish community of today cannot go forward until it recognises and repents its role in the murder and dispossession of the Palestinians.

However, also on this panel was Rabbi Jacob Milgrom, an American academic who holds views very different from those of Dr. Ellis, and who has come to live with his son in a Jewish settlement on confiscated Palestinian land. Though I found his views outrageous and distressing, I wish to express my unbounded admiration for the openness and tolerance of the Sabeel hosts: included in the audience, in addition to Rabbi Milgrom himself were other Jewish settlers who, like him, wore the knitted skullcaps of the devout Jews whose settlements occupy Palestinian land.

Rabbi Milgrom was introduced by Rev. Ted Keating, SM, panel moderator, as a Zionist who has come, after his retirement, to live in one of the Jewish settlements near Bethlehem. The rabbi spoke in English interspersed with sonorous quotations from the Old Testament in Hebrew. "The earth is mine, sayeth the Lord, and you are all merely travellers and wayfarers." So the question of the ownership of the land of Palestine is, for the rabbi, a question that only God can solve, and the Jubilee Year provides, according to Old Testament custom, a time when debts are forgiven and land is restored to its rightful owners. But who are the rightful owners?

When asked for specifics about what land he would be willing to concede to the Palestinians, the Rabbi professed this question too deep for his limited wisdom, something only God can resolve. Clear in his address, however, was the overwhelming presumption, based on the past divine preference for the Jewish people which he regards as explicit, according to his reading of the sacred texts, that this difficult problem would resolve itself in favour of the Jews.

At this point one Palestinian woman remarked that no one had apologised to her for the loss of her homeland, and Rabbi Milgrom seemed unwilling to do so. However, another Jewish settler in the audience raised his hand and said that he was prepared here and now to make such an apology, that he

apologised to all the Palestinians. Still there was no clear statement of what part of Palestine these settlers were prepared to return to the Palestinians, and this man's words seemed hollow in the absence of any decision that he would resign his holdings in the Occupied Lands and take the next plane back to Brooklyn.

Though I knew I was out of order, I made a speech from the floor, say-

ing that the Yahweh of the Old Testament was a genocidal maniac, unacceptable for a Christian to worship, that, though on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I was a recovering Roman Catholic, on all other days I was an atheist precisely because of the idea of God represented by the learned rabbi. I cited James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* as a Young Man in which, at the famous Christmas dinner scene, Stephen's father laments "My dead king Parnell" whom the priests had bunted down; when Aunt Dante says "the priests were always right! They were for God and for Ireland!" their guest shouts "Then no God for Ireland. No God for Ireland!" The meaning is that, if this is the Irish Church's idea of God, then he is not having any.

Jesus was right to teach us, I said, to pray "deliver us from evil" because the abomination of desolation is sitting in the Scriptures, and we must liberate God from the Old Testament. To me this is in fact the real meaning of a theology of liberation for the Palestinian crisis. The moderator finally shut me up and let Rabbi Milgrom answer. He said that those genocidal commands a) had never been carried out, and b) they occur in only one book in the Old Testament. To which I did not

address this to Rabbi Milgrom not as my friend but as my adversary. That he may be well-meaning I cannot rule out, though he must see the bloodshed and theft and violence, the beating and torture of children and the demolition of houses every day before his eyes, living as he has chosen to do on land which, according to international law belongs to the Palestinians but which, according to Rabbi Milgrom's reading of the Old Testament, is in the land promised by Yahweh to the Jews.

It is true that recent archaeological research seems to suggest (Thompson, Dever, et al) that violent Joshua-style conquests perhaps did not occur as they are literally said to have happened in the Old Testament legends. This is, however, completely irrelevant to the fact that such myths have been and continue to be manipulated to dispossess the Palestinian people. From Theodor Herzl to Golda Meir and Menachem Begin and Benyamin Netanyahu, the false claim to an exclusive divine right to the land of Palestine has been based on spurious interpretations of these very texts, and the rituals and totems of the Israeli military expansionist colonial state — like Masada and the myth of Solomon's temple and Rachel's tomb as exclusively Jew-

It is these "Promised Land-Divine Right" myths which the [Jewish] settlers invoke daily as they expropriate or destroy Palestinian houses and beat up or shoot to death Palestinian children. The consequences of this misrepresentation, this manipulation and cynical abuse of biblical texts, are tragic for all concerned.

ish possessions — provide carte blanche for Israelis to treat the Palestinians as they were treated by the Nazis. It is these "Promised Land-Divine Right" myths which the settlers invoke daily as they expropriate or destroy Palestinian houses and beat up or shoot to death Palestinian children.

The consequences of this misrepresentation, this manipulation and cynical abuse of biblical texts, are tragic for all concerned. As Dr. Ellis reiterated (something he has said frequently in his books), "We (i.e. the Jews) have become almost everything we loathed in our oppressors."

As to Rabbi Melnor's objection that these genocidal commands occur only once in the Jewish Bible, that is simply false as a scholar of his stature should know. They occur in Deuteronomy, 1 and 11 Samuel, in Joshua, in Judges, and they recur repeatedly in Psalms. I refer readers to Father Prior's book, *The Bible & Colonialism: A Moral Critique*, for detailed documentation of the biblical texts and their understanding among Jewish settler communities in present-day Palestine.

Rabbi Melnor, your Old Testament Yahweh is a bigot and a genocidal maniac, and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as you understand him, is not my God.

From Bethlehem I went to Gaza to visit friends who are infinitely worse off now, in their double-walled prison, than they were 10 years ago, with no access to the sea since Jewish settlements employing Thai labourers have usurped miles of coastline, and Palestinian fishermen are shot at by Israeli gunmen even when they fish within the severely circumscribed areas remaining to them. Children's medical conditions remain untreated, malnutrition is rife. Leaving Al Quds to return to the Bridge, just beyond Bethany on the road to Jericho (where "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among robbers"), I passed a huge uniformed Israeli force with bulldozers and military jeeps engaged in the destruction of hedonist homes, while the women tried to salvage blankets and lead away children. My driver was unwilling to stop so I could take photos because he would lose his licence, so I could not even witness with the camera this logical outcome of the exclusive claim to the Holy Land by the "chosen people."

IEA's chief sees oil prices going lower

LONDON (R) — The head of the International Energy Agency (IEA) was quoted as saying he did not believe oil prices currently languishing at nine-year lows had hit bottom yet.

IEA Executive Director Robert Priddle said in an interview with the London-based Saudi newspaper Al Hayat that he saw a big glut in the market, partly exacerbated by Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decision to

raise its output ceiling by 10 per cent this year.

Al Hayat quoted Mr. Priddle as saying in the interview in Paris, where the West's energy watchdog has its headquarters, that stocks were at an unusually high level for this time of year and he saw no indication that the market had reached its lowest point yet.

Asked if he believed prices would fall to as low as \$10 a barrel, Mr. Priddle said that while he did not

want to make a price prediction, he saw nothing to convince him that prices would not fall further.

Mr. Priddle said the IEA would be deeply concerned if low prices led some oil producers, some of which had already revised their budget estimates since the start of the year, to delay investment in future capacity.

Mr. Priddle said the state of the market was caused by lower demand from Asia

as a result of the currency crisis there, higher production from the OPEC, a mild northern hemisphere winter and the easing of the crisis with Iraq over weapons inspections.

Asked if he still believed there was no need for an oil producers' cartel in a free market, Mr. Priddle said part of OPEC's problem was that it was not effective and lacked cohesion from within, with members not respecting their quotas.

Murad urges French to invest in Jordan

AMMAN (Petra) — Talks between the heads of the Federation of Jordanian Chambers of Commerce (FJCC) and the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) started here Saturday.

The two sides stressed the need to enhance bilateral trade relations and setting up joint ventures in Jordan.

FJCC President Haidar Murad said trade and economic relations between Jordan and France are still below expectations, noting that the volume of trade between both countries amounted to JD 104.6 million of which JD 3.4 million were Jordanian exports to France.

This balance of trade in favour of France necessitates increasing French imports of Jordanian goods,

Mr. Murad said pointing out that Jordanian products have a relative advantage, particularly the potash and phosphate products in addition to the Dead Sea salts.

He encouraged the French side to invest in Jordan and to utilise the favourable investment climate in Jordan, the cheap labour force and the incentives granted to investors. PCCI President Mohammed Ben Hima voiced hope for increased trade exchange and setting up joint projects.

He stressed the importance of exchanging information on the economic activity in both countries, saying that it will contribute to increasing the volume of trade and setting up joint investment projects.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) You and your friends want to do something fun this weekend, but there's not enough money. You're going to have to scrimp, save or borrow — or modify your plans. The last is the best idea. You can make do with less extravagance and still have a good time.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Recent decisions have changed the landscape somewhat. Hopefully, the change was for the better. If not, put the correction in first thing this morning. There's still room for flexibility then. Later in the day, the concrete will have set and you'll have a firm foundation upon which to build.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) If you don't make a decision by tomorrow, somebody else could make it for you. That's not the best position to be in. Better to go into a meeting tomorrow morning prepared. If you need to, pray or meditate on it. Ask for guidance, open your mind, listen and take what you get.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You're in a difficult programme and it's going to continue for a while. You're learning to be tough, and that's never easy. Make a pact with your friends to support each other. Together, you'll be much stronger than any one of you would be alone. That's part of the lesson you're learning.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Your adventure could be curtailed by interference from an older person. Be careful if you're travelling. The unwelcome advice you receive could come in the form of a traffic ticket if you're not careful. Play by the rules and you'll do fine.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You and your sweetheart should take a little joy across town. In fact, you could go across the county. You have permission to go for the sheer fun of it, for the joy and enlightenment of running through meadows full of wildflowers. If there are no wildflowers where you live yet, go skiing.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Discuss finances with your mate first thing this morning. If you pool your resources, you'll be able to get something you both want. But first you'll have to decide exactly what that is. Pick an objective you can agree upon, then go shopping.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) The situation isn't going to materialise quite like you expected. That's OK. You could end up with something better. You and a partner need to reevaluate the matter and make sure a new decision takes all of your considerations into account.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You're still having a great time, but there's more work to be done. You and your friend can get it finished in no time. In fact, you might consider it play. The difference is in your attitude. You're just in the mood to have everything seem like fun. So, go ahead and get busy.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Hopefully, you'll have time for romance tonight. That should be on your agenda, anyway. It looks like a commitment is imminent. If you and your sweetheart have been worried about money, relax. It might take a while, but you'll achieve whatever you set your hearts on.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You won't feel much like going out, so you might as well have the gang over to your place. Nobody will be in the mood to spend much money, so make it a pot luck. They'll enjoy the opportunity to show off their latest recipes, and you won't have to cook. Provide the electricity instead.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You want to move slowly and carefully, but you're also itchy to do something wild and crazy. The trouble is, you want to do it with your money. Calm down, think things over and act wisely. It's also a good day for learning, but you don't want to learn the hard way.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper

Japan hit by record high jobless rate

TOKYO (AFP) — Japan was hit by a torrent of grim economic data which showed unemployment at a record high and retail sales crumbling, as the world's second largest economy slides towards recession.

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in February hit a record 3.6 per cent, up 0.1 percentage points from January, the government said in a monthly report.

Analysts warned Japan's job-for-life culture was at an end, with unemployment likely to rocket this year.

The number of unemployed reached 2.46 million in February, up 160,000 from a year earlier, the Management and Coordination Agency said. It was the nation's highest jobless rate since the agency started compiling data in 1953.

"The decline was due to the deteriorating situation in the construction and manufacturing industries," an agency official said.

Workers in construction companies totalled 5.55 million, down 70,000, or 1.2 per cent, and those in the manufacturing sector stood at 12.69 million, down 470,000, or 3.6 per cent.

"The weakness of the Japanese economy has begun affecting the country's once-secure employment," said Yasukazu Shimizu, an economist at NCB Research Institute.

"The unemployment data shows us the beginning of Japan's economic sickness," he added.


In an effort to revive the flagging economy, the ruling party announced a record economic package of \$124 billion Thursday, but failed to include crucial income tax cuts.

Kenji Yumoto, a senior economist at the Japan Research Institute, warned worse was to come.

"The nation's jobless rate will hit four per cent by the end of the year," he said.

"Negative employment situations are reported mainly in the manufacturing sector now, but high jobless rates would be seen in non-manufacturing (sectors) later this year, particularly in the financial sector," Mr. Kenji said.

A poll this week showed that 69 per cent of major Japanese companies surveyed said the nation's economy was getting worse, compared with 39 per cent in a similar survey conducted in October last year.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET											
HOUSING BANK CENTER - JORDANIAN											
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179											
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 28/03/1998											
											
PAST 12 MONTHS	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF	NO. OF	VALUE	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE		
HIGH	LOW			TRANS.	SHARES	TRADED	PRICE	PRICE			
346.000	250.000	ARAB BANK	13.8	1.18	4	120	40560	341.00	338.00	3.00	-
2.340	1.660	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	8	0.00	21	24956	41682	1.69	1.67	0.02	-
2.680	1.650	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	10.4	6.03	6	6250	10810	1.72	1.73	0.01	-
5.300	4.660	THE HOUSING BK.	29.9	1.94	3	1343	6680	5.00	5.00	0.00	-
9.200	6.620	JOR. CO-OP BANK	3.7	12.29	6	4350	2740	6.63	6.62	0.01	-
4.020	1.960	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	10.0	4.87	13	5050	9938	1.97	1.97	0.00	-
BANK SECTOR TOTALS											
2.400	1.590	JOR. FRENCH INSUR.	5.6	12.38	15	19425	397761	1.96	2.02	0.06	+
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS											
1.140	1.550	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	9.9	4.85	4	1850	3811	2.08	2.06	0.02	-
3.080	2.060	SHIPPING LINES	13.9	4.78	1	100	116	2.15	2.10	0.05	-
1.480	1.130	NID. EAST HOTELS	17.7	0.00	1	100	116	1.13	1.16	0.03	+
1.090	0.900	ZAKA EDUCATION	16.5	0.00	3	1071	1006	0.95	0.94	0.01	-
1.830	1.550	UNIFIED CO.	6.9	7.10	3	750	1183	1.55	1.55	0.00	-
0.810	0.600	UNION LAND DEV.	9	0.00	2	1500	975	0.66	0.65	0.01	-
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS											
1.160	0.930	ATTACHEES	9	0.00	2	426	459	1.10	1.08	0.02	-
4.450	2.690	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	18.4	4.03	37	15802	43271	2.77	2.73	0.04	-
7.050	5.620	ARAB POTASH CO.	14.6	3.19	3	13801	82806	5.78	6.00	0.22	+
11.160	9.200	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.3	1.480	2	7480	26287	10.60	10.67	0.07	+
2.350	1.100	INDUSTRIAL COM. AGR.	5	0.00	24	6050	7791	1.27	1.25	0.02	-
7.350	5.800	JOR. WORSTED MILLS	10.2	3.16	1	7500	47400	6.32	6.32	0.00	-
3.440	2.000	ARAB PHARM. IND.	13.9	3.95	25	5400	27489	5.08	5.08	0.00	-
2.940	2.750	JORDAN OIL	6.4	5.65	1	50	144	2.88	2.88	0.00	-
1.530	1.020	JOR. PIPES MANFACT.	15.0	6.61	5	1262	1527	1.23	1.21	0.02	-
2.330	1.800	GENERAL MINING	3	3.74	1	200	374	1.97	1.87	0.10	-
6.350	4.400	QAR ALDHIA DEV. INV.	14.7	6.17	1	10000	60000	6.15	6.00	0.15	-
0.370	0.270	INTERMED. TRNG. CHEN.	9	0.00	16	25200	10237	0.41	0.40	0.01	-
0.710	0.500	JOR. ROCKWELL INDOS.	9	0.00	2	282	146	0.53	0.52	0.01	-
3.000	0.920	NATL. CABLE WTR. NYAC	27.4	0.00	3	1000	1340	1.17	1.14	0.03	-
0.790	0.530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEN	9	0.00	24	32250	19279	0.59	0.58	0.01	-
1.560	1.150	NATL. CEMENT	16.6	5.38	19	15700	20688	1.33	1.30	0.03	-
1.670	0.810	UNIV. MOON. INDOS.	16.0	6.00	38	21450	21441	1.01	1.00	0.01	-
1.360	0.690	JOR. INDOS. RESOURCES	10.1	13.32	10	4893	3530	0.77	0.75	0.02	-
1.620	1.150	NATL. CHEMICAL	13.9	0.00	1	8600	12522	1.46	1.47	0.01	-
1.080	0.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	18.3	0.00	17	11375	11440	1.03	1.00	0.03	-
1.980	1.290	EL. & WTR. READY WEAR	46.8	0.00	3	2100	2799	1.34	1.33	0.01	-
1.250	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.4	0.00	4	1150	1346	1.18	1.17	0.01	-
1.220	0.860	UNION CH. & VEG.	45.9	0.00	2	64	64	1.02	1.01	0.01	-
0.850	0.660	JORDAN STEEL	37.1	6.10	27	26820	21299	0.82	0.81	0.01	-
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS											
1.140	0.930	ATTACHEES	9	0.00	2	426	459	1.10	1.08	0.02	-
4.450	2.690	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	18.4	4.03	37	15802	43271	2.77	2.73	0.04	-
7.050	5.620	ARAB POTASH CO.	14.6	3.19	3	13801	82806	5.78	6.00	0.22	+
11.160	9.200	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.3	1.480	2	7480	26287	10.60	10.67	0.07	+
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1.140	0.930	ATTACHEES	9	0.00	2	426	459	1.10	1.08	0.02	-
4.450	2.690	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	18.4	4.03	37	15802	43271	2.77	2.73	0.04	-
7.050	5.620	ARAB POTASH CO.	14.6	3.19	3	13801	82806	5.78	6.00	0.22	+
11.160	9.200	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.3	1.480	2	7480	26287	10.60	10.67	0.07	+
2.350	1.100	INDUSTRIAL COM. AGR.	5	0.00	24	6050	7791	1.27	1.25	0.02	-
7.350	5.800	JOR. WORSTED MILLS	10.2	3.16	1	7500	47400	6.32	6.32	0.00	-
3.440	2.000	ARAB PHARM. IND.	13.9	3.95	25	5400	27489	5.08	5.08	0.00	-
2.940	2.750	JORDAN OIL	6.4	5.65	1	50	144	2.88	2.88	0.00	-
1.530	1.020	JOR. PIPES MANFACT.	15.0	6.61	5	1262	1527	1.23	1.21	0.02	-
2.330	1.800	GENERAL MINING	3	3.74	1	200	374	1.97	1.87	0.10	-
6.350	4.400	QAR ALDHIA DEV. INV.	14.7	6.17	1	10000	60000	6.15	6.00	0.15	-
0.370	0.270	INTERMED. TRNG. CHEN.	9	0.00	16	25200	10237	0.41	0.40	0.01	-
0.710	0.500	JOR. ROCKWELL INDOS.	9	0.00	2	282	146	0.53	0.52	0.01	-
3.000	0.920	NATL. CABLE WTR. NYAC	27.4	0.00	3	1000	1340	1.17	1.14	0.03	-
0.790	0.530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEN	9	0.00	24	32250	19279	0.59	0.58	0.01	-
1.560	1.150	NATL. CEMENT	16.6	5.38	19	15700	20688	1.33	1.30	0.03	-
1.670	0.810	UNIV. MOON. INDOS.	16.0	6.00	38	21450	21441	1.01	1.00	0.01	-
1.360	0.690	JOR. INDOS. RESOURCES	10.1	13.32	10	4893	3530	0.77	0.75	0.02	-
1.620	1.150	NATL. CHEMICAL	13.9	0.00	1	8600	12522	1.46	1.47	0.01	-
1.080	0.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	18.3	0.00	17	11375	11440	1.03	1.00	0.03	-
1.980	1.290	EL. & WTR. READY WEAR	46.8	0.00	3	2100	2799	1.34	1.33	0.01	-
1.250	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.4	0.00	4	1150	1346	1.18	1.17	0.01	-
1.220	0.860	UNION CH. & VEG.	45.9	0.00	2	64	64	1.02	1.01	0.01	-
0.850	0.660	JORDAN STEEL	37.1	6.10	27	26820	21299	0.82	0.81	0.01	-
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS											
1.140	0.930	ATTACHEES	9	0.00	2	426	459	1.10	1.08	0.02	-
4.450	2.690	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	18.4	4.03	37	15802	43271	2.77	2.73	0.04	-
7.050	5.620	ARAB POTASH CO.	14.6	3.19	3	13801	82806	5.78	6.00	0.22	+
11.160	9.200	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.3	1.480	2	7480	26287	10.60	10.67	0.07	+
2.350	1.100	INDUSTRIAL COM. AGR.	5	0.00	24	6050	7791	1.27	1.25	0.02	-
7.350	5.800	JOR. WORSTED MILLS	10.2	3.16	1	7500	47400	6.32	6.32	0.00	-
3.440	2.000	ARAB PHARM. IND.	13.9	3.95	25	5400	27489	5.08	5.08	0.00	-
2.940	2.750	JORDAN OIL	6.4	5.65	1	50	144	2.88	2.88	0.00	-
1.530	1.020	JOR. PIPES MANFACT.	15.0	6.61	5	1262	1527	1.23	1.21	0.02	-
2.330	1.800	GENERAL MINING	3	3.74	1	200	374	1.97	1.87	0.10	-
6.350	4.400	QAR ALDHIA DEV. INV.	14.7	6.17	1	10000	60000	6.15	6.00	0.15	-
0.370	0.270	INTERMED. TRNG. CHEN.	9	0.00	16	25200	10237	0.41	0.40	0.01	-
0.710	0.500	JOR. ROCKWELL INDOS.	9	0.00	2	282	146	0.53	0.52	0.01	-
3.000	0.920	NATL. CABLE WTR. NYAC	27.4	0.00	3	1000	1340	1.17	1.14	0.03	-
0.790	0.530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEN	9	0.00	24	32250	19279	0.59	0.58	0.01	-
1.560	1.150	NATL. CEMENT	16.6	5.38	19	15700	20688	1.33	1.30	0.03	-
1.670	0.810	UNIV. MOON. INDOS.	16.0	6.00	38	21450	21441	1.01	1.00	0.01	-
1.360	0.690	JOR. INDOS. RESOURCES	10.1	13.32	10	4893	3530	0.77	0.75	0.02	-
1.620	1.150	NATL. CHEMICAL	13.9	0.00	1	8600	12522	1.46	1.47	0.01	-
1.080	0.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	18.3	0.00	17	11375	11440	1.03	1.00	0.03	-
1.980	1.290	EL. & WTR. READY WEAR	46.8	0.00	3	2100	2799	1.34	1.33	0.01	-
1.250	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.4	0.00	4	1150	1346	1.18	1.17	0.01	-
1.220	0.860	UNION CH. & VEG.	45.9	0.00	2	64	64	1.02	1.01	0.01	-
0.850	0.660	JORDAN STEEL	37.1	6.10	27	26820	21299	0.82	0.81	0.01	-
INDUSTRI											

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

U.S. investor to invest \$200 million in huge projects at Irbid's QIZ

** ACCORDING TO informed sources, a U.S. investor in Hong Kong intends to establish huge investments estimated at about \$200 million at Al Hassan Industrial Estate in Irbid. "The U.S. investor has presented an application to the concerned government authorities to get large plots of land at the estate to set up his projects," the sources said.

The investor, the sources added, is interested to set up his plants at the Al Hassan Industrial Estate in particular "because the area is a qualified industrial zone (QIZ) and the products manufactured there are allowed to enter the U.S. market free of customs duties." The informed sources expect

the new investments to create 2,000 job opportunities over the coming two years.

"The investor has expressed readiness to move some of his industries in Jabal Ali and other locations in the Middle East to Amman or expand his existing investments," the sources said adding that he also expressed his readiness to capitalise on the QIZ status of Al Hassan Industrial Estate to make it his main centre for manufacturing and exporting his products to the U.S.

The government authorities have shown preliminary readiness to provide a suitable area for the U.S. investor until the area of the estate is enlarged during the next three months (Al Ra'i).

Indo-Jordan Chemicals Company reports \$1.55m net profit in first year of operation

** THE \$170 million Indo-Jordan Chemicals Co. Ltd. (IJC) project at Eshtiya in Jordan, has turned in a scintillating performance in its very first year of operation, according to a company report sent to the Jordan Times on Saturday.

The company is the biggest joint venture outside India promoted by an Indian company.

The joint venture between Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation Limited (SPIC), the Indian fertilizer giant, Jordan Phosphate Mines Co. Ltd. (JPMC), and the Arab Investment Co. S.A.A. (TAIC), a Pan-Arab financial institution, has successfully implemented its project culminating in the start of the phosphoric acid trial production in April, 1997.

As per the directors' report, the project stands capitalised as of July 31st, 1997 at an estimated cost of \$169.5 million without any cost or period overrun.

During its very first financial year, though limited to five months, the company has turned out a commendable performance. The cash profit — profit before depreciation and amortisation — stood at \$5.29 million.

The company set aside \$3.74 million towards depreciation while amortisation and pretax profit reached \$1.55 million. Being exempted from income and corporate taxes because of its location in the industrial free zone of Jordan, the net profit reached \$1.55 million.

The company, which entered its operation phase effective August 1997, has had an excellent run except for a bad patch during November, 1997, when the phosphoric acid reactor lining failed.

According to Mr. Babu K. Verghese, deputy chairman and managing director, the capacity utilisation of the phosphoric acid plant has grown steadily over the months since commissioning.

During the very third month (31 day run) of the operation phase, the plant surpassed the 100 per cent capacity utilisation mark — a remarkable and record breaking feat when compared with other phosphoric acid plants worldwide.

Mr. Verghese said he was confident in reaching a 100 per cent capacity utilisation (production of 220,000 MT P2O5) in the very first "whole" year of operation.

Accordingly, the complex is expected to earn a revenue of \$80 million, which is expected to yield \$15 million.

Mr. Verghese added that, as of mid-March, about 190,000 MT of phosphoric acid solution were exported, fetching \$37.00 million in foreign currency earnings.

He said IJC planned to double the existing capacity of phosphoric acid and to implement a 2000 MT per day DAP plant in Jordan.

Six Euro-Jordanian business consultants ready to support Jordanian private enterprises

AMMAN (J.T.) — Small and medium-sized enterprises are often too busy and too cash restrained to take advantage of specialised business consultancy services, offered by local and international consultants.

Now six experienced Jordanian and European consultants intend to remedy this shortcoming. Together they constitute the Euro-Jordanian Business Service team, a non-profit consultancy team, financed by the European Union. The purpose of the assistance is to provide direct assistance to individual privately owned Jordanian enterprises for the next three years.

The scope of services offered depends solely on the needs of each individual enterprise, whether it is in production, marketing, export development, management, training, information technology or other areas.

The service will be provided in three stages:

Firstly, two of the six

consultants of the Euro-Jordanian Business Service team will perform a preliminary company review to identify the areas where assistance is needed and determine whether the company can be included in the second stage of the programme.

The second stage involves extensive management support by specially selected European and Jordanian consulting companies.

More specialised support can be offered at the third stage. A minor contribution will be required from the beneficiaries for the second and third stages.

To qualify for participation, Jordanian enterprises must fulfil certain eligibility criteria and apply for participation on a separate form, which can be obtained at the Business Service Center, the Delegation of the European Commission, or at Jordanian Business Associations. Due to financial and time restraints participation is limited. No



The Euro-Jordanian Business Service team

direct loans or grant facilities are included in the services.

The Business Service Team is organised by Deloitte & Touche Europe Services and its Jordanian counterpart, Saha & Co. in coordination

with the Delegation of the European Commission, the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Deloitte & Touche is one of the world's largest and most experienced consulting and

auditing companies. The six Business Consultants, selected for the team, have a total of 130 years international consulting practice in production, marketing, organisation, information technology and financing.

Gulf Air says most '97 profit was from asset sale

ABU DHABI (R) — Most of the \$48 million profit the four-nation Gulf Air posted in 1997 came from the sale of assets, its chief executive has said.

"Of this, only \$8 million was operating profit and the rest was from sales of assets which was necessary to overcome the cash flow difficulties," Sheikh Ahmed Ben Saif Al Nahayan was quoted as saying by the UAE's daily Emirates News.

He said that Gulf Air recorded a \$48 million net profit in 1997 after a \$156 million loss in 1996 and that the airline had sold 17 planes valued at \$850 million since 1996, leaving its fleet at 28.

The Emirates News quoted him as saying that when he took over the running of the airline — equally owned by Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and the UAE emirate of Abu Dhabi — in January 1996, it had been in "very bad shape."

"Our cash flow was negative and we could not pay...our suppliers and indeed, staff salaries were hard to find," the chief executive said. "We were confronted with a total collapse of confidence from the financial sector, among our own staff whose morale was very low and throughout the industry in general."

His comments were the most frank yet that Sheikh Ahmed has made publicly on the financial woes of the Manama-based carrier, which has cut jobs and closed unprofitable routes to reduce losses.

INVITATION TO PRIVATE SECTOR ENTERPRISES IN JORDAN

The Euro-Jordanian Business Service Team invites private enterprises to participate in the Private Sector Development Programme. The primary purpose of this three-year Programme is to promote the growth of market economy in Jordan by providing direct assistance to private businesses within virtually all sectors of productions and services.

The Programme is financed by the European Union through the MEDA line in agreement and co-operation with the Government of Jordan. The main component of the Programme is the Business Support Service, which offers direct expert consultancy assistance to individual enterprises based on individual assessments of needs. No direct loans or grant facilities are included in the Programme. Due to financial and time constraints participation is limited.

Private enterprises wishing to participate in this Programme must conform to the following criteria for eligibility to receive assistance:

Eligibility Criteria

- Registered private Jordanian legal entity
- Jordanian ownership majority
- Manufacturing or service
- Documented sustained activity over time
- Sustainable financial situation
- More than 10 and less than 200 employees
- Certified financial accounts
- Willing to share cost at moderate level
- Managerial analytical capabilities

In order to facilitate the process of application the following establishments have been kind enough to avail the application forms and relevant information on the Programme at their offices:

- Jordan Export Development & Trade Centres Tel: 5603507 Fax: 5684568 Corporation (JEDCO)
- The Investment Promotion Corporation (IPC) Tel: 5531081 Fax: 5521084
- Amman Chamber of Industry (ACI) Tel: 4643001 Fax: 4647852
- The Federation of Jordanian Chambers of Commerce (FCC) Tel: 5684425 Fax: 5685997
- Jordanian Businessmen Association (JBA) Tel: 5680855 Fax: 5680663
- Jordan Trade Association (JTA) Tel: 5685603 Fax: 5685605
- Jordan Business & Professional Women Club Tel: 5511647 Fax: 5530092 (JBWPC)

The information and forms can also be obtained from the Delegation of the European Commission in Amman, or the Euro-Jordanian Business Service Team at the following addresses:

Delegation of the European Commission
Shmeisani, 43 Al-Jaheth St.
Tel: +962-6-5668191
Fax: +962-6-5686746

Euro-Jordanian Business Service Team
Jabal Amman, 3rd Circle - Muhamed Hafiz Maath St.
P. O. Box: 182938 - Amman 11118, Jordan
Tel: +962-6-4654050 / Fax: +962-6-4652374
e-mail: bst@index.com.jo

REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NG	FRF
US Dollar	1.8271	0.5942	1.4980	130.30	1.4145	1801.63	2.0883	6.1250	
DE Mark	0.5473	-	0.3251	0.8199	71.30	0.7740	966.79	1.1270	3.3619
GB Sterling	1.6628	3.0760	-	2.6205	219.25	2.3903	3031.78	3.4664	10.3072
CH Franc	0.8676	121.89	0.3963	-	86.95	0.8436	1201.89	137.38	4.0061
JP Yen	0.0077	1.4017	0.4658	-	1.1492	-	1.0852	157.36	4.6989
CA Dollar	0.7070	1.2892	0.4195	1.0665	1.09	-	1270.84	1.4522	4.3201
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0139	0.3296	0.0631	1384.47	0.7849	-	11.43	3.3988
NL Guilder	0.4866	88.70	0.2884	72.74	63.23	0.6867	874.66	-	2.9736
FR Franc	0.1633	0.2983	0.0970	24.4832	21.25	0.2308	33.62	33.6200	-

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	SAUD	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP	
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7803	3.3770	3.6395	0.3051	3.6726	1627.30	3.4170
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	5.2896	0.5317	5.1333	0.4303	5.1800	2154.18	4.8195
Saudi Riyal	0.2699	0.1891	-	0.1008	0.97	0.0814	0.98	407.25	0.9111
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8807	9.9483	-	9.65	0.8093	9.74	4051.41	9.0641
Qatar Dinar	0.2748	0.1948	1.0304	-	0.0838	1.01	419.55	0.9389	
Kuwait Dinar	3.2776	2.3238	12.2920	1.2356	11.93	-	12.04	5005.90	0.9389
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1931	1.0212	0.1026	0.9910	0.0831	-	415.86	0.9304
Lebanese/1000	0.65	0.4642	2.4555	0.2468	2.3830	0.1998	2.4048	-	2.2973
Egyptian	0.2927	0.2075	1.0975	0.1103	1.0691	0.0893	1.0748	448.97	-

Energy									
Oil	Crude	Refined	Mid-East Currencies						
Brent	14.98	15.24	SA Riyal	0.2566	0.4873	0.1884	0.3997	34.7672	
W. Texas	16.80	16.89	AE Dirham	0.2723	0.4974	0.1818	0.40616	35.4825	
Bonny	14.98	15.24	KW Dinar	3.2776	5.99161	1.9478	4.514	427.168	
Dubai	13.18	12.99	BH Dinar	0.3770	0.49731	1.9729	3.97614	346.791	
U.L. Gas	160.00	160.00	CY Pound	1.8729	3.4214	1.1125	2.8082	244	

Main Equity Indices									
Index	Value	Change	High	Low	Open	Close	Change	High	Low
New York	DOW JONES	8796.08	-50.61	-0.57	8898.72	8771.88	8848.89		
New York	S&P 500	1095.44	-5.38	-0.49	1107.18	1091.14	1100.8		
London	FT-SE 100	5939.3	33.7	0.57	5977	5988	5906.6		
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	16738.26	-241.36	-1.42	17076.4	16736.5	16980.6		
Paris	CAC 40	3810.23	26.45	0.7	3881.1	3788.29	3783.78		
Frankfurt	DAX	5083.16	43.4	0.86	5085.44	5036.21	5039.76		

JORDAN MARKETPLACE *** JORDAN MARKETPLACE *** JORDAN MARKETPLACE

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Rios to face Agassi in Lipton final with top spot at stake

KEY BISCAVNE (AFP) — Marcelo Rios and Andre Agassi, the hottest players on the ATP Tour this year, will meet in the final of the Lipton Championships with the World No. 1 ranking on the line.

Rios, the World No. 3, can end American Pete Sampras' 102-week reign at the top of the rankings with a victory in Sunday's final of the \$4.6 million event.

The Chilean, who defeated Briton Tim Henman 6-2, 4-6, 6-0 to reach the final, has never played Agassi, a former World No. 1 who cruised past eighth-seeded Spaniard Alex Corretja 6-4, 6-2.

Agassi has won 24 matches this year and appears to have recovered from a miserable 1997 with victories in two tournaments: San Jose and Scottsdale.

Agassi, 27, won this event in 1990, 1995, and 1996 and reached the 1994 final before losing to Sampras. Now he has the chance to prevent Rios from unseating his compatriot.

With a victory in the final, Rios would become the 14th player to hold the top spot since the inception of the ATP rankings in 1973.

Rios, seeded third, ended Henman's impressive run in the tournament and improved his own record to 24-3 this season.

Rios, 22, will be gunning for his eighth career singles title and his third title in one of the ATP Tour's prestigious Super Nine events.

Last season, Rios prevailed at Monte Carlo for his first career Super Nine title and won the Super Nine Champions Cup at Indian Wells, California, two weeks ago.

In addition, Rios captured the title in Auckland, New Zealand, in January and was a finalist at the Australian Open.

By reaching the final, Rios is assured of at least the No. 2 ranking, which is a career high for the Chilean.

He surrendered his first set of the tournament to Henman, but gave up only five points in the final set.

The Chilean, whose fierce groundstrokes and flowing locks prompted comparisons with Agassi when he turned pro four years ago, said nothing would make him happier than taking the top ranking with a win over the U.S. veteran.

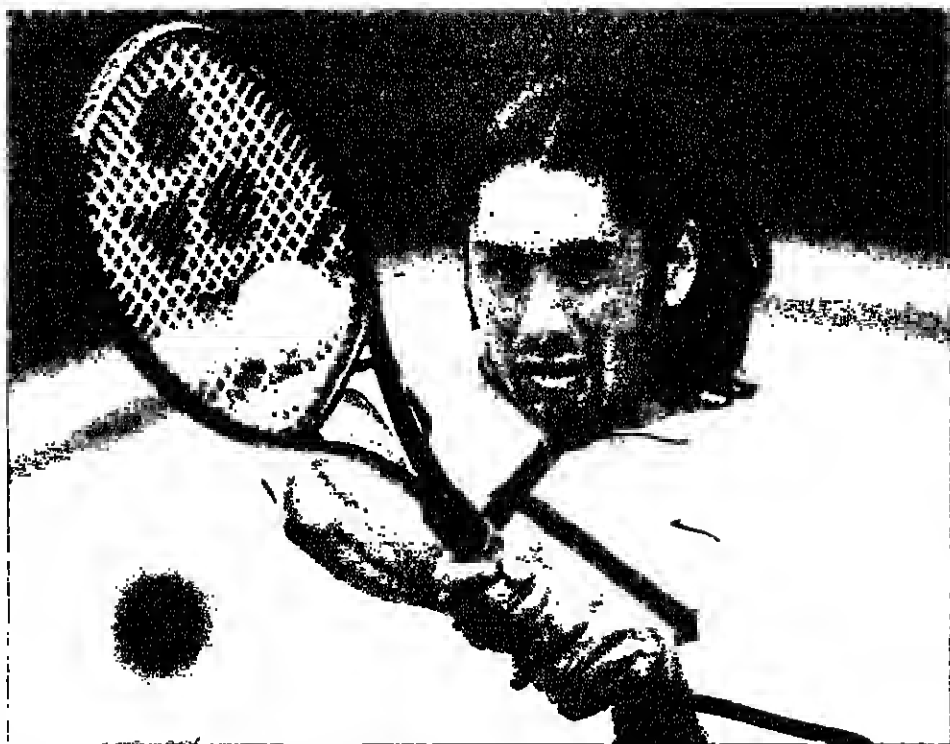
"I can't imagine anything better," Rios said.

Meanwhile, two of the brightest teenagers in women's tennis will meet for the first time when American Venus Williams faces Anna Kournikova of Russia in the final.

Williams, 17 and seeded



Andre Agassi of the U.S. serves to Alex Corretja of Spain in the first set of their semi-final match at the Lipton Championships. Agassi, who is seeded 29th, upset 8th seed Corretja 6-4 6-2 to advance to the final Sunday. Agassi will play Chile's Marcelo Rios for the championship (Reuters photo)



Marcelo Rios of Chile returns a first set serve from Tim Henman of Great Britain in their semifinal match at the Lipton Championships. Rios defeated Henman 6-2 4-6 6-0 to advance to the final (Reuters photo)

11th, upset top seed Martina Hingis of Switzerland for the second time this year in the semi-finals. Kournikova, 16, continued her remarkable run through the draw with a three-set victory over eighth seed and two-time champion Arantxa Sanchez Vicario of Spain.

Batistuta wants to go home

MILAN (AFP) — Fiorentina could be about to lose their Argentine star Gabriel Batistuta because the team skipper is homesick.

Fiorentina are trying to negotiate a new contract that would take the 29-year-old ace through to 2002, and then lead to a management job in Florence after his playing career ends.

But Batistuta, whose existing contract ends in 2000, dismissed the idea saying: "I've always said that Florence is my second home and I mean it. But if it's second, there has to be a first and that's

Argentina.

"I don't want to live far from my country for the rest of my life. My third child is going to be born soon, while my parents are living in Reconquista."

Batistuta's ambition is to return to Buenos Aires and his old club Boca Juniors while he is still at his peak, playing on for another two seasons.

However, he has also made it clear to Fiorentina boss Vittorio Cecchi Gori that the club needs to strengthen the squad if he is to stay on even after the World Cup finals.

Speculation is rife that current coach Alberto Malasani will leave — possibly swapping jobs with Bologna's Renzo Ulivieri, or being replaced by either former Italy and AC Milan coach Arrigo Sacchi or Argentina's national coach Daniel Passarella.

If Batistuta is not satisfied by Cecchi Gori's efforts over the next few months, he could well move to another Serie A club — AC Milan and Inter have both expressed interest — or possibly to England, where he has previously been linked with Manchester United.

Vicenza braces for Chelsea fans

VICENZA (AFP) — Italian police and Vicenza club officials are taking special measures to head off any boogies among the Chelsea fans due here next week.

The two sides meet here on Thursday night for the first leg of the European Cup Winners' Cup semi-finals, with Vicenza tiny "Romeo Menù" ground set to be packed to its 20,000 capacity.

British police have warned the Italian authorities that up to 1,000 known and highly dangerous hooli-

gans are planning to make the trip, looking to buy from ticket touts on the night.

Vicenza were planning to make only 1,140 tickets available to Chelsea fans — the capacity of one of the covered stands.

Now there are plans to free up to 300 more on the north terrace, prompting club officials to arrange for extra netting to keep the two sets of fans apart, Tuttisport newspaper said.

There was chaos here on Friday, when the first set of tickets were due to

go on sale. Hundreds of people were already waiting outside by eight o'clock in the morning but the sale was suspended by order of local police, fearing that English fans might be among the crowd.

However, ticket booths opened normally in the afternoon, as the city prepares for a historic cup tie.

Spectators will be given a souvenir programme and a small red and white flag on their way into Vicenza's first ever European cup semi-final.

Fredericks takes S. African 100m record

JOHANNESBURG (AFP)

— Namibian sprint star Frank Fredericks eclipsed the South African all-comers 100m record held by good friend Linford Christie here on Friday night at a rain-plagued All-African invitational track and field meeting at the Johannesburg stadium.

Christie set the 100m open record of 9.97 seconds in the same meeting three years back.

Despite a damp track, Fredericks took full advantage of the windless conditions to register a time of 9.96 with Nigerian Deji Aliu (10.22) and Antoine Boussombo of Gabon (10.26) completing the top three placings.

"I went out on to the track to better Christie's time," said Fredericks after the race.

"I knew I could do it at altitude because I was satisfied with my winning time of 10.08 at sea level in the Grand Prix Summer Series final in Cape Town last week.

"Besides, we can't let the foreigners hold all our records."

Fredericks confirmed that he had plans to compete in the African senior track championships in Dakar, Senegal, between August 18 and 23.

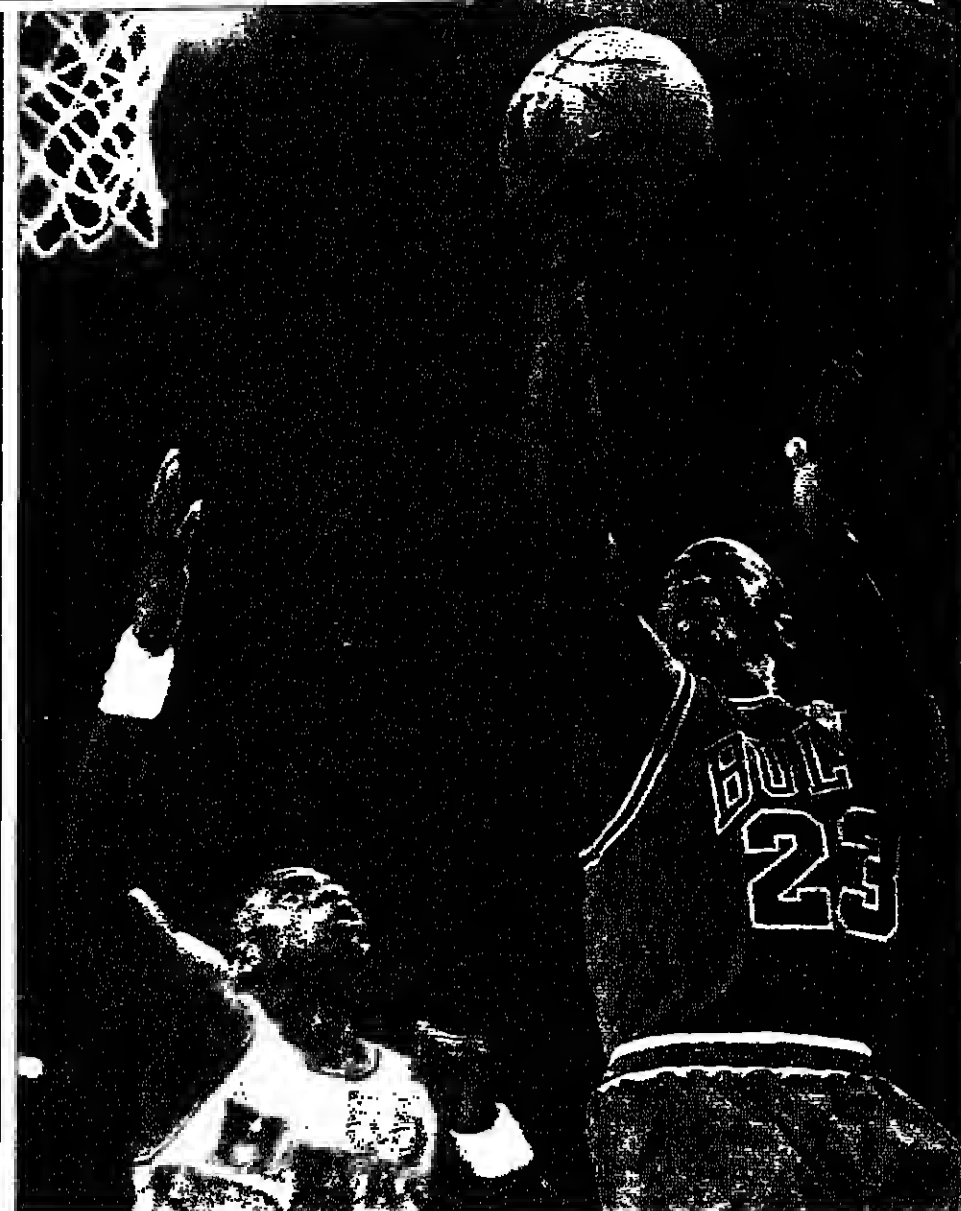
"I've never competed in the African championships before and I would love to add another medal to my collection," added the double Olympic sprint silver medalist.

"I've only made one appearance for the African team in World Cup competition in winning the silver medal in the 200m in Japan in 1996, so I am also looking forward to competing at that event in Johannesburg in September."

Nigerian Charity Opara surprised her highly-rated 400m Olympic bronze medalist and national teammate Fallat Ogunkoya in the one lapper to clock a South African open record of 49.87 seconds.

Ogunkoya finished second in 50.27 with Australian Susan Andrews finishing third in 51.87.

The most competitive race of the meeting was the men's 3,000 metres, where South African Shadrack Hoff had just too much finishing power for former world record holder Moses Kiptanui, winning in 7 minutes and 56 seconds.



Chicago Bulls Michael Jordan makes a layup past the defense of the Atlanta Hawks Dikembe Mutombo in second quarter action in Atlanta as the Bulls beat the Hawks 89-74. A new NBA attendance record was set at the Georgia Dome as 62,046 fans came to see Michael Jordan in what was possibly his final game in Atlanta (Reuters photo)

Coach Brown, Coleman and Iverson fined by NBA

NEW YORK (AFP) — Coach Larry Brown, forward Derrick Coleman and guard Allen Iverson of the Philadelphia 76ers were fined by the National Basketball Association on Friday for publicly criticizing NBA referees.

Brown and Coleman were fined \$6,000 each by NBA senior vice president of basketball operations Rod Thorn. Iverson received a \$3,000 fine.

Brown ripped into the refs for changing three calls in Wednesday's 91-86 loss to the New Jersey Nets and complained that Iverson did not get a fair shake.

"Allen had 20 shots and only went to the line once," said Brown. "I think he has a

legitimate gripe." Coleman drew a hefty fine for claiming that referee calls have been going against the Sixers all season.

"It is terrible," Coleman said after Wednesday's loss. "I'm not going to complain about it now, it's been going on all year. Saying something on the court won't change anything."

Iverson also accused the refs of making calls against Philadelphia all season.

"We're trying to win games and it is tough when the referees are like that," said Iverson. "It has been that way all year."

SCOREBOARD

NBA			
Indiana	133	Charlotte	96
Chicago	89	Atlanta	74
Cleveland	88	Detroit	87 (OT)
Miami	102	Milwaukee	77
Boston	82	New Jersey	76
San Antonio	110	Philadelphia	85
Orlando	100	Houston	75
Utah	99	Dallas	90
Denver	97	Golden State	89
Phoenix	89	Washington	85
Minnesota	100	LA Clippers	98
Portland	90	Sacramento	73
New York	97	Vancouver	89 (OT)

Bundesliga			
Wolfsburg	1	1860 Munich	0
Hamburg	2	Werder Bremen	1

Morocco ATP Tour
Quarter-finals:
Sebastian Grosjean (Fra) bt Hicham Arazi (Mar x2)
7-5, 2-6, 6-3
Andrea Gaudenzi (Ita x4) bt Juan Antonio Marin (Spa x6)
6-7 (4/7), 7-5, 6-2

CINEMA	TEL: 567420	CINEMA	TEL: 5934793	CINEMA	TEL: 5934793	CINEMA	TEL: 5934793
PHILADELPHIA '1'	PHILADELPHIA '2'	PLAZA	CONCORD	GALLERIA 2	GALLERIA 1	Hisham Yanes Theatre	
Leonardo Di Caprio ... in		The biggest cinema production	Kim Basinger... in	ABDOUN	ABDOUN	STARTING APRIL 6TH	
ROMEO & JULIET	SALT ON OUR SKIN	TITANIC	L.A. CONFIDENTIAL	GRAND OPENING	GRAND OPENING	Don't Laugh Please	
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 12:00, 3:00, 7:00, 10:30 p.m.	Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:45	Shows: 5:15, 8:30	Shows: 3:30, 7:00, 10:30	We're Jordanian	
			Adel Imam & Yusra ... in	The film is also on at 2:00 p.m. & 12:00 a.m. on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays	The film is also on at 12:00 a.m. on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays	Starring Hisham Yanes, Amal Dabbas, Rania Kurd and the group	
			RISALA ILA AL WALI			at 8:30 p.m.	
			(ARABIC)			For reservations call: 4640155, 4625155	



FIA bans controversial braking system

SAO PAULO, Brazil (AP) — Formula One's governing body FIA banned Saturday a controversial braking system used by three teams, saying it amounted to four-wheel steering, which is forbidden.

The new system, used by McLaren, Williams and Jordan, prevents oversteer and wheel spin when the car is going into and out of a curve. Using two brake pedals and a still secret cockpit mechanism, drivers can choose which rear wheel to brake for better traction on curves.

On Thursday, Ferrari, Tyrrell, Arrows, Minardi and Sauber lodged a formal protest against the three teams, claiming the system was illegal.

Race stewards concluded that the device used by the three teams violated a FIA regulation forbidding four-wheel steering, FIA said.

The three teams will be able to appeal the decision. The new system was widely seen as the determining factor behind McLaren's 1-2 victory in the season opener in Melbourne three weeks ago.

But McLaren says its strong comeback is due to a complete package including chassis, aerodynamics and its Mercedes-Benz V-10 engine.

In Friday's free practice sessions, in which the new braking systems were not used, McLaren drivers Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard posted the two fastest laps.

Bitter battle for control threatens to wreck FIFA

PARIS (AFP) — The bitter battle to be the next president of FIFA, football's all powerful ruling body, exploded into angry accusations of abuse of power and possible damage to this summer's World Cup on Friday.

Only hours after it was confirmed that FIFA's general secretary Sepp Blatter would be a candidate to replace outgoing president Joao Havelange, UEFA chief Lennart Johansson launched a blistering attack on the Swiss-German.

"I am worried that the highest ranked employee of the FIFA administration has been misusing his position as general secretary to prepare his candidature and is campaigning for himself instead of focusing on the existing problems of FIFA such as the ticketing problems with the World Cup in France," fumed Johansson.

"What is more he has been permitted to do so with the encouragement and the protection of the FIFA president who is resigning very shortly."

"Now we face the fact that there is an unpleasant development that could put the name of FIFA in disrepute," added the Swede.

Johansson's attack on Blatter has turned the election struggle into a public slanging match that threatens to split FIFA, admit senior FIFA sources.

"We cannot have two such senior people within the organisation involved in such a battle. Nobody gains and football loses," said one FIFA official.

Blatter, who is only second in power to Havelange within the sport's ruling body, will join the fray next week during a carefully orchestrated press conference in Paris on Monday.

But earlier on Friday Havelange officially announced that his right-hand man for the past 16 years would be a candidate to replace him.

The Brazilian said Blatter had written to him, saying that as he had the support of several national associations, he had decided to stand.

In Monday's press conference he will be backed by Michel Platini, co-president of the French World Cup organising committee.

Platini's presence will be a nasty public snub to Johansson, who is the chairman of the World Cup organising committee.

Blatter has decided to make his first public announcement as would-be president in Paris because it is where FIFA was created. It also underlines the fact that he speaks fluent French, as well as English, German,

Spanish and Italian. Johansson only speaks English and German, apart from his mother tongue.

The "French Connection" clearly worries Johansson and his backers.

The 69-year-old revealed earlier this month that he feared French president Jacques Chirac might use his position to sway the French Football Federation (FFF).

"But there will be an outcry if Chirac does," said Johansson.

But outcry or not, such a move could prove fatal to Johansson.

Gerhard Aigner, general secretary of UEFA European football's governing body, launched a thinly veiled attack on Chirac on Thursday.

"Now we learn that even heads of state are being mobilised in favour of Blatter's candidature and they are going to use their influence on former colonies to encourage their federations to nominate the secretary-general," said Aigner.

There is now growing suggestions amongst some FIFA members that Havelange will at the last minute step in and offer to stay on for another two years until the next congress.

"He will offer himself to stop a split in world football," said one official on Friday.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

PSG hint at Stade de France move

PARIS (AFP) — The 1996 Cup Winners Cup champions Paris Saint Germain hinted here on Friday that they could leave their home of Parc des Princes and move to the Stade de France after this year's World Cup Finals. Paris Saint Germain, whose majority shareholder is subscription television station Canal Plus, sent a letter of 'intention' essentially declaring an interest in the move to the new showpiece stadium, especially built for this year's World Cup extravaganza. Three other clubs declared formally on Friday that they would be candidates to play at the stadium — Racing Club of France, Red Star 93 and Saint Denis/Saint Leu. They will join PSG in round table discussions with Marie-George Buffet, the French Minister for Sport and Youth, and The Stade de France Consortium on April 2. PSG's move will dismay the Mayor of Paris Jean Tiberi, whose domain includes Parc des Princes, as the French rugby team decided last year to play all their Paris based internationals at the Stade de France instead of the more intimate Parc des Princes.

Meyrieu ruled out of top clash

PARIS (AFP) — The French National Sports Olympic Committee ruled here on Friday that Metz midfielder Frederic Meyrieu could not play in the French championship top of the table clash with Lens on Sunday. Their decision, following an appeal by Lens who trail Metz by a point, overruled Wednesday's decision by the French Football Federation's (FFF) disciplinary committee to lift his one match ban temporarily. The President of Lens, who have won the title once albeit in 1944 as the Occupied France champions, protested that he had nothing personal against Metz or Meyrieu but that he had appealed in the interests of preserving 'the principles, the rules and the ethics of the game'. Earlier Metz President Carlo Molinari, whose side are five matches away from claiming their first ever title, had said that he wouldn't allow Meyrieu to play anyway as it would place a question mark over the match.

Paes to miss Davis Cup clash

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's Davis Cup hopes were dealt a severe blow Saturday when star player Leander Paes pulled out of the World Group tie against Italy with a shoulder injury. Vece Paes, the player's father and a doctor, announced: "There is no possibility of him playing even the doubles. Playing can only aggravate the injury." The away tie is scheduled to be held in Genoa between April 3-5. Paes, the Olympic singles bronze medalist, and Mahesh Bhupathi are currently ranked among the world's top doubles pairings.

Ravanelli wants Roma

ROME (AFP) — Fabrizio Ravanelli wants to leave Olympique Marseille after only one season and return to Italy with AS Roma. It was claimed here on Saturday. Ravanelli, who joined Marseille after a year with English club Middlesbrough, has offered his services to the capital club after the World Cup finals are over. Rome would be within reach of the White Feather's Perugia home and Ravanelli has told his agent that he would be willing to take a wage cut to return to the Serie A. The Italian striker is currently guaranteed \$1.5 million a year until 2002. But he also has a gentleman's agreement with OM boss Jean Michel Roussier that, in the event of an offer from an Italian club, the asking price would only be around five million to \$6 million. Roma are meanwhile widely expected to offload Argentine striker Abel Balbo at the end of the season. The final decision on Ravanelli, who won the 1996 European Cup with Juventus before leaving for Teesside, will be down to Roma's coach Zdenek Zeman, the Corriere dello Sport said.

Princess Haya ends participation in Zurich Tournament

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

HRH PRINCESS Haya Saturday completed her participation at the 12-nation Zurich International Equestrian Tournament but had to withdraw when her horse balked at the obstacle in the speed competition in which 45 top seeded champions took part.

Top ranked Hugo Simon of Austria was also eliminated as were Germany's Olympic champion and World Cup titleholder and European champion Britain's Michael Whitaker.

Participants had to clear 12 obstacles of 140 centimetres each. Germany's Marcus Mirchvorn came in first place with a time of 54.72 seconds followed by Britain's Nick Skilton with a time of 55.52 seconds.

Switzerland's Pete Mendley was third with a time of 55.80 seconds.

Organisers of the event meanwhile invited Princess Haya to the Lucerne Tournament which will take place June 4-7.

Meanwhile, the Princess visited the Jordanian wing of the exhibition held on the sidelines of the tournament.

Organised by the Ministry of Tourism, the exhibit aims to market the Kingdom internationally and promote interest in its archaeological sites.

Over 10,000 visitors attended the exhibition which included documentaries about Jordanian sites such as Petra, Mount Nebo, Karak, and Aqaba.

The mounted Badia police and a folkloric troupe also presented highly successful Jordanian nights. Princess Haya took part in the Zurich Tournament for



the past two years. She has competed in international equestrian championships since 1986 in Syria, Iraq, Qatar, Japan, Ireland, England, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, and Monaco.

She won the Jordanian championship in 1988 and was voted Jordan's top athlete in 1993.

Arsenal pull out of Wembley bid

LONDON (AFP) — Double seeking Arsenal pulled out of their proposed bid to buy the home of English football Wembley Stadium here on Friday insisting their change of heart would serve the interests of English football.

Arsenal, who are six points behind Premiership leaders Manchester United with three games in hand and are in the FA Cup semi-finals, were considering moving from their Highbury ground to Wembley.

The board of Arsenal Football Club Plc announces

that its proposal to Wembley Plc offering to buy Wembley Stadium has lapsed, having not been accepted by 5pm, Friday, March 27, a statement issued by Arsenal said.

"Following discussions with Wembley, the board of Arsenal believed that it was in the interests of all parties, including England's bid to host the World Cup in 2006, to reach clarity on Arsenal's position in relation to the stadium."

"Consequently, Arsenal set a deadline by when its propos-

als had to be accepted or would lapse."

Arsenal's decision to observe their self-imposed deadline follows reports earlier this week that residents and traders around Wembley were intending to fight to the bitter end against the Premiership club's bid to buy the national stadium.

The Gunners' hopes of purchasing the Wembley complex as their new home followed

fierce opposition to their existing plans to redevelop their 38,000-capacity Highbury ground.

They then learned, while they were waiting for Wembley Plc to decide between their offer and a £200 million (\$300 million) redevelopment bid by the English National Stadium Trust, that the Wembley alternative proposal was also upsetting locals.

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Ex-CIA chief calls Iraqi case a stain on U.S. honour

LOS ANGELES (R) — A former CIA director on Friday became the lawyer for six Iraqis facing deportation after a secret court hearing and said that if they are sent home the chances were good that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would have them executed.

U.S. President Bill Clinton's first CIA Director James Woolsey met the six men for the first time at the immigration facility at a Los Angeles prison where they have been held more than a year.

He then told reporters his clients were denied basic rights guaranteed under the constitution.

"If these men are deported back to Iraq, all of us believe the chances are good that they would be killed, and die quite horrible deaths," Mr. Woolsey said.

He added, "this case at this point stands as, really, a stain on the honour of the United States. All of us need to work hard to see to it that these men are dealt with fairly."

After a series of hearings, U.S. immigration Judge D.D. Stigraevs determined earlier this month that the defendants represent a security risk and signed their deportation orders.

The hearings were conducted largely in secret with much of the evidence and testimony deemed classified and kept from the defendants and their lawyers.

Because Mr. Stigraevs also sealed large portions of his ruling, Mr. Woolsey and his team say they have not been told why their clients are considered security risks and have little idea how to defend them.

"[Supreme Court Justice] Felix Frankfurter said 50 years ago that fairness is rarely obtained by secret, one-sided determinations of fact," Mr. Woolsey said on Friday. "And what we've had in this case is exactly a secret, one-sided determination of the facts."

The men had worked for a CIA-backed resistance group that failed in an attempt to topple President Hussein. They were among 600 people evacuated in 1996 from northern Iraq after the Iraqi leader's forces stormed through a U.S.-led security zone and crushed the resistance effort.

Washington jailed eight men as potential security risks and initiated proceedings to have them deported. Mr. Stigraevs found that two men did not represent

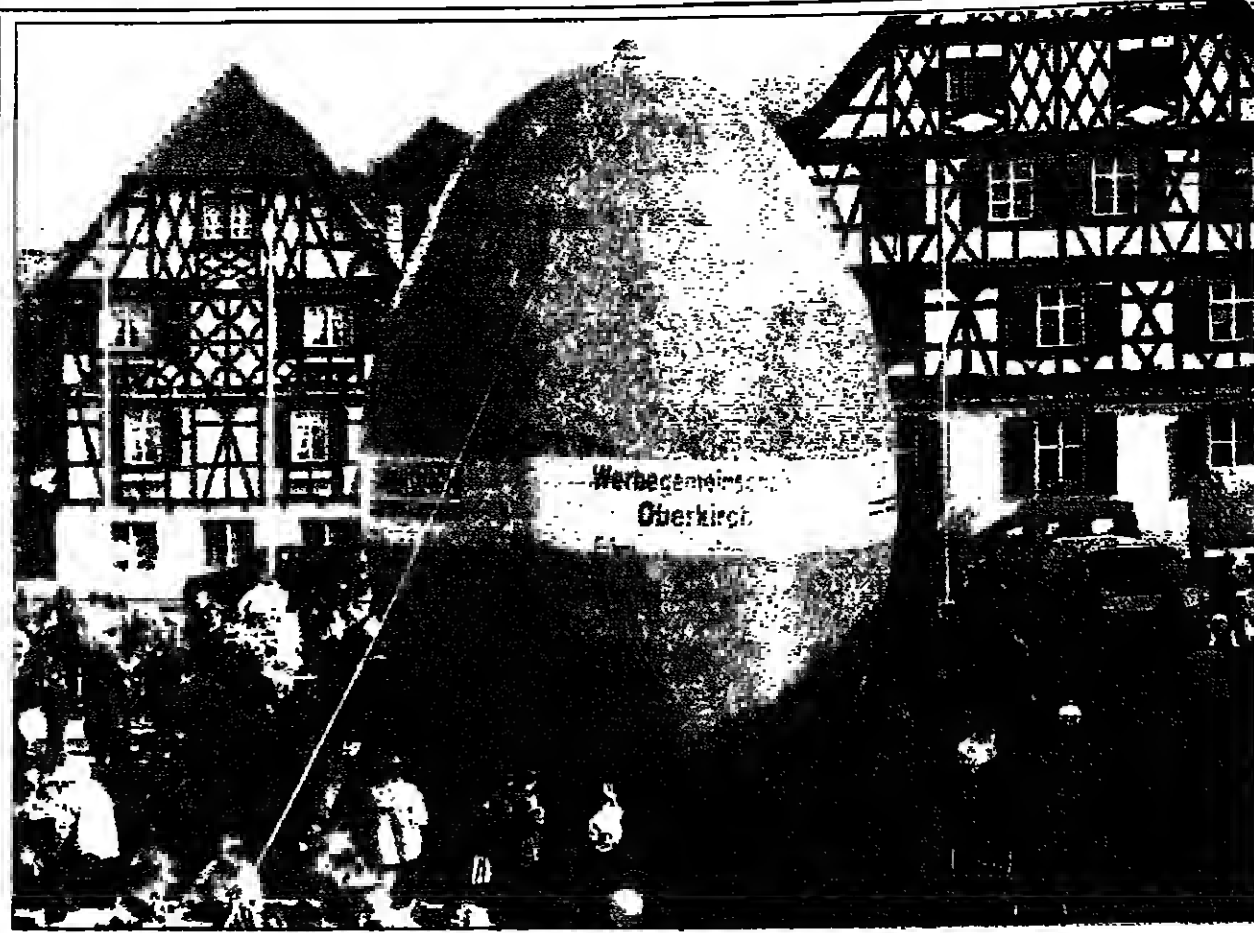
security risks, and ordered them released. But the remaining six defendants say that they would be executed as traitors if returned to Iraq.

Mr. Woolsey said he would attempt to use his security clearance with the U.S. government to learn more about the accusations against his clients.

Among the witnesses called by the defence during the hearings was Ahmad Chalabi, a leader in the Iraqi resistance who testified in December that he worked with three of the men and they faced torture and execution if sent back to Iraq.

Mr. Chalabi, president of the executive council of the Iraqi National Congress, said the three — Safa Al Batai, Ali Yasin Mohammad-Karim and Ali Jehjoh Saleh — had been publicly branded "traitors and spies" by President Hussein since their evacuation from Iraq.

Mr. Woolsey was CIA director from January 1993 to December 1994 when he quit after a troubled tenure in which he clashed with Congress over the agency's budget and the reshaping of U.S. intelligence activities.



LARGEST EASTER EGG OF ALL: People stand around a huge Easter egg that was erected on the historical market place of the Black Forest town of Oberkirch, southwestern Germany on Saturday. According to organisers, the 8-metre-high egg, consisting of wood and cardboard, is the biggest of the world. They will seek an entry into the Guinness Book of records (AP photo)

Turkish army tells government to restore relations with EU

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey's powerful military leadership has advised Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz to drop his harsh rhetoric against the European Union and restore ties with Brussels, Turkish newspapers reported Saturday.

In a meeting of the country's National Security Council, which brings together the military and political leadership once a month, the generals on

Friday recommended a more diplomatic approach in Turkey's bid for accession to the EU, the papers said.

The generals suggested that Mr. Yilmaz should restore the ties with the European Union, frozen by four months of political paralysis in retaliation for exclusion from accession talks last December.

Mr. Yilmaz had accused the European Union of wanting to remain a "Christian club."

after the Luxembourg summit decided in December to pass Turkey over for accession talks.

But the military leadership recommended that the prime minister concentrate on lobbying more sympathetic EU members instead, the Turkish Daily News reported, suggesting that one such country might be France.

The warm reception given to Turkey's President

Suleyman Demirel in Paris in February had raised Turkish hopes of French support in its accession bid.

The generals stressed the importance of close ties with Britain, arguing that London could play a key role for Turkey in the EU, the Turkish Daily News said.

Chief of General Staff Ismail Hakkı Karadayi visited London earlier this month.

Annan to brief Russian, Chinese, British leaders on situation in Iraq

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan travels to Moscow, Beijing and London from Sunday to brief their political leaders on the agreement he secured with Iraq on U.N. arms inspections.

Mr. Annan visits Moscow from March 29-30, Beijing on March 31 and April 1, and London from April 3-4 to shore up support for the Feb. 23 agreement which averted U.S. military strikes against Iraq.

U.N. spokesman Juan Carlos Brandt said Friday that "the secretary general feels that the agreement with Iraq was partly his responsibility, and he wanted to see that political support for it was sustained."

As a result, Mr. Annan is consulting with the capitals of all five permanent U.N. Security Council members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

He briefed French leaders on his way back to New York from Baghdad, and held talks in Washington on March 11 and 12.

In the accord, Iraq agreed to open up all sites to the U.N. weapons inspectors verifying the elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. The memorandum of understanding also provided for diplomats to accompany the

inspectors to so-called presidential sites, which Iraq had declared off-limits to the U.N. inspectors.

Inspections of the eight presidential sites continued without incident for the second straight day on Friday. Chief U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler has hailed the "new spirit" of co-operation since the U.N.-Iraq accord.

But U.N. officials are under no illusion that the cooperation will continue, if the sanctions are not lifted in the coming months. "There is a feeling that the final chapter [of the crisis] has not yet been written," one official said.

In Moscow, Mr. Annan is to meet with Russian President Boris Yeltsin at a turbulent time in Russian politics. Mr. Yeltsin announced Friday that he was nominating young reformer Sergei Kiriyenko as prime minister, and threatened to dissolve parliament if it rejected the appointment.

A senior U.N. official said that Mr. Annan would meet with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, and probably with Mr. Kiriyenko.

Russian diplomats said that in addition to Iraq, Mr. Annan's talks were also likely to focus on the Middle East, which the U.N. chief has just toured, and U.N. missions in

Georgia and Tajikistan. Russia played an active role in defusing an early phase of the U.N.-Iraq crisis, and has promised to work for an early lifting of the U.N. oil embargo.

But Moscow's request to Mr. Annan to appoint a Russian deputy to Mr. Butler raised suspicions here that Russia wanted to increase political surveillance of the U.N. Special Commission charged with dismantling Iraq.

No decision has been taken. But Washington has publicly ruled out such a move, apparently aimed at providing a political counterweight to Mr. Butler's existing deputy, U.S. arms expert Charles Duelfer. U.N. sanctions can only be lifted when the U.N. inspectors have certified the dismantling of all Iraqi nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and missiles with a range of more than 150 km that could hit Iraq's neighbours.

Iraq has been under sanctions since the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

China also hopes for the speedy lifting of sanctions, but notes that first Iraq must comply with the U.N. disarmament resolutions.

In Beijing, Mr. Annan will not meet the new Chinese premier, Zhu Rongji, whom he will see in London.

Iranian paper praises sacking of Saudi cleric

TEHRAN (AP) — An Iranian newspaper on Saturday praised Saudi Arabia for firing a cleric accused of insulting a former Iranian president.

The privately-owned newspaper Jomhuri Islami said the move would strengthen ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. "The dismissal is a positive step taken by the Saudi authorities and would bolster the strengthening of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia," the daily said.

On Wednesday, the official Iranian news agency said Sheikh Hoziefi, the head cleric at the Prophet's Mosque in the Saudi Holy City of Medina, had been fired. The Prophet's Mosque is the birthplace of Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

Earlier this month, Sheikh Hoziefi made insulting remarks about Shiite Muslims during a Friday prayer sermon attended by Iran's former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was visiting Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) said.

Mr. Rafsanjani got up and left in protest, IRNA reported. Saudi officials did not comment on the reports.

In a related development, an Iranian official has accused Saudis of harassing Iranian pilgrims in Medina, seizing their prayer books and copies of the Koran, the Islamic Holy Book.

Indian coalition government wins confidence motion

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's fledgling Hindu nationalist-led government survived a confidence motion here Saturday, ending four months of political paralysis in the world's largest democracy.

The multi-party coalition, led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and sworn in last week following indecisive February-March elections, scraped through by 274 votes to 261 following two days of ill-tempered debate.

Mr. Vajpayee pledged before the parliamentary vote that his government would not spring a night-wing radical "hidden agenda" on the country.

India has had five governments in the past two years. The previous one collapsed in November, leading to marathon national elections for around 375 million voters.

Mr. Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), with 16 regional partners and also backed by a handful of independents, went into Saturday's vote with 264 of 545 seats, just short of a majority.

But one of its former opponents switched sides at the last minute to ensure its survival.

Most of Saturday's debate was dominated by accusations that the BJP, which champions a philo-



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee arrives at the parliament building in New Delhi Saturday (AP Photo)

ophy of "one nation, one people, one culture," planned to replace India's secular constitution with a Hindu theocracy.

But the 71-year-old Vajpayee rejected the claim, saying he would put the coalition's policies ahead of those of his party.

"The opposition has been talking of our hidden agenda. Ours is an open agenda, a national agenda and we do not have any other agenda," he said.

"As long as I am the prime minister I will stand by that agenda."

Opposition parties said the BJP would bulldoze through uniform laws on marriage, divorce and inheritance which are opposed by the country's 125 million Muslims, making up 13 per cent of the population.

They said it would also advocate the building of a temple on the rubble of a mosque destroyed by Hindu fanatics in northern India in 1992, an issue which led to 2,000 deaths in religious riots.

Both policies featured in the BJP election manifesto but were not mentioned in the coalition's "national agenda" unveiled last week.

Mr. Vajpayee beaded a previous Hindu nationalist government in 1996 but it collapsed after 13 days.

Analysts, however, predict he is unlikely to last long this time because of his reliance on so many coalition partners, most of which are small regional groups with conflicting priorities.

The BJP's rivals, however, with the once-dominant Congress to the fore, are similarly fragmented, made up of 21 parties.

Their efforts to launch a rival coalition after the February-March polls, however, failed because of disagreements on who should lead the alliance.

Faeces hit the fan in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO (R) — A Sri Lankan charged with theft threw a plastic bag filled with human faeces at policemen but it hit a fan and showered the entire court, officials said. They said the accused, Subhashinghe Premasiri, had taken the bag out of his pocket and thrown it at policemen when he was asked to step into the witness box. "The bag struck a fan, got entangled and the entire court was showered with excreta," said an official at the court in Modera. Premasiri was remanded by the chief magistrate for insulting the dignity of the court, which had to be cleaned before proceedings could continue.

Apple Computers recruits new salesman... the Dalai Lama

WASHINGTON (AFP) — His mind and heart are on a higher plane, but the Dalai Lama's face is now appearing on U.S. magazines, billboards, and kiosks as part of a quirky new ad campaign by Apple Computer, Inc. The exiled spiritual leader of Tibet made his Madison Avenue debut recently, said Apple spokeswoman Rhonda Hamilton, exchanging his likeness for a charitable donation. His Holiness — no computer whiz himself, according to one associate — is part of Apple's "Think Different" campaign, which aims to associate the company with historic figures who faced tough odds and changed the world.

Artist spends 10 days in box in interest of science

LONDON (AFP) — English artist Ansuman Biswas has spent ten days shut inside a box in total silence and without food in the interest of science. The Guardian newspaper reported. Biswas, who is of Bengali origin, said his period in the black box, measuring 2 m by 2.7 m, was intended to "redefine the Western science of particle physics using Eastern meditation techniques." Biswas staged his "performance" at an art gallery in London, sustained by 30 litres of water. "It is like getting up in the morning, the first morning ever," Biswas said on emerging to describe the experience, which he said was "actually quite banal."

Couple kiss for 29 hours to win New York contest

NEW YORK (R) — A kiss is not always just a kiss. Sometimes it is a world record. A Michigan couple won a contest on Thursday for the world's longest kiss — locking lips for 29 hours. Roberta and Mark Griswold outlasted eight other couples in the kissing contest, with their closest competitor dropping out 22 minutes earlier. Asked afterward to name the key to their success, a weary Griswold said, "comfortable underwear." "And we've been practicing for 16 years," his wife added. Under the rules, the couples' lips had to touch constantly, they had to remain standing and no breaks were allowed.

Ice cream 'makes you happy' — study

LONDON (AFP) — Eating ice cream makes you happy. British researchers said Thursday. A report by the Association for Research Into the Science of Enjoyment found people who enjoyed eating ice cream were twice as likely to be happy and relaxed than stressed. Scientists believe the effect could be caused by ingredients in ice cream which trigger the brain chemical serotonin, thought to reduce stress levels. Last year Britons ate \$1.6 billion worth of ice cream.

Israel's Iraqi Jews look to build bridge with their motherland

By Claire Sneygaroff
Agence France Presse

TEL AVIV — Decades after leaving their homeland for Israel, prominent Iraqi Jews are extending a hand to their former countrymen in a bid to form a bridge between Israelis and Arabs.

Around 100 Israeli intellectuals, writers and businessmen, most of Iraqi origin, recently announced the creation of an "Iraqi-Israeli Friendship" group, said member Saud Zadka, a communications professor at Tel Aviv University.

"We're hoping to strengthen

our ties with the Iraqi diaspora and also have a little bit of influence on the political situation in Iraq," Mr. Zadka told AFP.

While the group gives "moral support" to the Iraqi opposition seeking to overthrow the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, a key goal is to improve the image of Iraqis and other Arabs among the Israeli public, members said.

"For 50 years, the Israelis have lived under the false impression that Jews were maltreated by the Iraqis even though they lived among

them for centuries until the creation of Israel in 1948," said businessman David Sasson.

Mr. Sasson insisted that Israeli feelings that Arabs are inevitably hostile to Jews are

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eddy pointed to Iraq as an example of the "rough neighborhood" in which Israel is located, saying Israel must preserve its security by a hard-line position in the peace process with the Palestinians.

mistreated by Arabs in their countries of birth could also help "improve the perception which Israelis have of Palestinians," Mr. Zadka said.

Because of the group's Iraqi origins, it shares a "common

history" with Arabs, said Mr. Sasson. "It's a large family and we are cousins," he said. Meanwhile, the organisation wants to do what it can to help the opposition to

President Saddam's regime, offering to pass messages and conduct research for exile groups.

"We know that it is not possible to topple Saddam by traditional means," Mr. Zadka said. "Our fight is more humanitarian than political."

Next week, the group will play host to Dia Kashi, an opposition member living in London, who is to give a conference in Tel Aviv, members said.

"Many Iraqi opposition figures fear for their lives and are afraid to come to Israel or even have contacts with

Israelis," said Shimon Ballas, an Arab literature professor at Tel Aviv University.

Some 300,000 Iraqi Jews live in Israel, most of whom immigrated to the country soon after its creation in 1948.

Israel views Iraq as its chief enemy in the Arab World and during the February crisis between Baghdad and the United Nations fears were high in the Israeli public of an Iraqi missile attack against the Jewish state.

Iraq fired a number of Scud missiles at Israel during the 1991 Gulf war, killing one person and injuring scores.

